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BEAUCHAMP:

OR,

THE ERROR.

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"THE SMUGGLER," "DARNLEY," "RICHELIEU,"

ETC. ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

TARNINGHAM Park was exceedingly quiet; for Sir John Slingsby was out at dinner some five miles off, and his merry activity being removed, every living thing seemed to think itself entitled to take some repose. Mrs. Clifford, who had been far from well for several days, and had not quitted her room during the whole morning, had gone to bed; Mary and Isabella were conversing quietly — perhaps sadly — in the drawing-room; the butler snored in the pantry; the ladies' maids and footmen were enjoying a temporary calm in their several spheres; and

cook, scullions, and housemaids were all taxing their energies to do nothing with the most meritorious perseverance. Even the hares hopped more deliberately upon the lawns, and the cock-pheasants strutted with more tranquil grandeur. Every one seemed to know that Sir John Slingsby was absent, and that there was no need to laugh, or talk, or dance, or sing, or eat, or drink, more than was agreeable. The very air seemed to participate in the general feeling, for, whereas it had been somewhat boisterous and keen during the day, it sunk into a calm, heavy, chilly sleep towards night, and the leaves rested motionless upon the trees, as if weary of battling with the wind.

“We will have a fire, Mary,” said Isabella; “though it be summer in the calendar, it is winter in the field, and I do not see why we should regulate our comfort by the almanac. Papa will not be home till twelve, and though he will be warm enough, I dare say, that will do nothing for us.”

As she spoke, she rose to ring the bell; but at the same moment another bell rang, being that of the chief entrance, and both Miss Slingsby and her cousin looked aghast at the idea of a visitor. Some time elapsed before

their apprehensions were either confirmed or removed; for there was a good deal of talking at the glass door; but at first the servant did not choose to come in with any explanation. At length, however, a footman appeared, in very white stockings and laced knee-bands, saying, with a grin, "If you please, ma'am, there is little Billy Lamb at the door wishes to see you. He asked for Sir John first. I told him he couldn't, for you were engaged; but he said he was sure you would, and teased me just to tell you he was here."

"Billy Lamb!" said Isabella. "Who is that?—Oh, I remember: is not that the poor boy at the White Hart?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied the footman; "the little humpback that you gave half-a-crown to one day when he was whistling so beautiful."

"Oh, I will see him, of course," said Isabella, much to the footman's amazement, who could not see the "of course;" "I will come out and speak with him."

"Have him brought in here, Bella," said Mary. "I know the poor boy well, and his mother, too. The poor daughter is dead; she married badly, I believe, and died two or three years ago."

“Bring him in,” said Miss Slingsby to the servant; and the man retired to fulfil her commands. As Billy Lamb entered the room, the two fair girls, both so beautiful, yet so unlike each other, advanced towards the door to meet him; and stood before the poor deformed boy, leaning slightly towards each other, with their arms linked together. The boy remained near the entrance, and the footman held the door open behind him till Miss Slingsby nodded her head as an intimation that his presence was not required.

“Well, William,” said Isabella, as the man departed, “how are you, and what is it you want?”

“And your poor mother, William?” said Mary Clifford—“I have not seen her a long while—how is she?”

“She is much better, thank you, ma’am,” replied the boy. “She is reconciled with Stephen, now, and has gone to be with him up in the cottage, and take care of his little boy, my poor sister’s orphan; and so she is much better.” Then turning to Isabella, he went on—“I am quite well, thank you, miss; but somehow my heart is very down just now, for I came up to

tell Sir John something very terrible and very bad."

"Is it magistrate's business, William? or can I give you any help?" asked Isabella.

"Oh dear, no, Miss Slingsby," replied the boy, "it is not about myself at all, but about Sir John;" and he looked up in her face with his clear, bright, intelligent eyes, as if beseeching her to understand him without forcing him to further explanations.

But Isabella did not understand him at all; and she inquired—"What do you mean, my good lad? I am sure my father will be glad to do anything he can for you; and I do not think that you would yourself do anything very terrible and very bad, such as you speak of."

"Hush, Isabella!" said Mary Clifford, whose heart was a more apprehensive one than her cousin's, and who had some glimmering of dangers or sorrows hidden under the boy's obscure words: "Let him explain himself. Tell us, William, exactly what you mean. If wrong has been done you, we will try to make it right; but you spoke of my uncle: has anything happened to Sir John?"

"No, Miss Mary," replied Billy Lamb, "but

I fear evil may happen to him if something is not done to stop it."

"But of what kind?" asked Isabella, anxiously: "tell us all about it. What is it you fear? Where did you get your information?"

"From Mr. Bacon," answered the boy, simply, "the little lawyer at Tarningham, ma'am. He's not a bad man, nor an unkind man either, like Mr. Wharton; and, though he did not just bid me come up and tell Sir John, yet he said he very much wished he knew what was going to happen. Then he said he could not write about it, for it was no business of his, as he was but acting for others, and he did not like to send a message, because——"

"But what is it?" exclaimed Mary Clifford and Isabella together. "In pity's name, my good boy, do not keep us in suspense!"

"Why, ma'am, he said," continued the boy, in a sad tone, and casting down his eyes, "that to-morrow there would be an execution put in here—that means that they will seize everything. I know that, for they did so six months after my father died. Then he said that very likely Sir John would be arrested, unless he could pay five thousand pounds down at once."

Isabella sank into a chair overwhelmed, exclaiming, "Good Heaven!"

"This is what Captain Hayward told us of!" said Mary Clifford, putting her hand to her brow, and speaking rather to herself than to her cousin. "How unfortunate that he should be absent now! This duel, depend upon it, has prevented him from taking the means he proposed for averting this blow. I feel sure he could and would have done as he promised."

"Oh, whatever Ned Hayward promised he was able to perform," answered Isabella; "nothing but some unfortunate circumstance, such as this duel, has prevented him. He is as true and open as the day, Mary. What would I not give for but five minutes' conversation with him now."

"Would you? Would you?" said the musical voice of the poor boy. "I think, if you want them, you can have them very soon."

"Oh, you dear good boy!" cried Isabella, starting up, "send him here directly, if you know where he is. Tell him that my father's safety depends entirely upon him: tell him we are ruined if he does not come."

"I do not think I can send him," said the

boy, in a disappointed tone. "I don't think he can come : but if you like to go and see him, I will venture to take you where he is ; for I am sure you would not do him a great injury, and say anything of where he is hid."

"Go to him?" exclaimed Isabella ; "why, it is growing quite dark, my good William. How can I go? But this is folly and weakness," she exclaimed, the next moment ; "when my father's liberty and character are at stake, shall I hesitate to go anywhere. I will go, William. Where is it? Is it far?"

"Stay, dear Isabella," said her cousin ; "if needful, I will go with you. This is a case which I think may justify what would be otherwise improper. But let me ask one or two questions. You say Mr. Bacon told you this, William. If he wished my uncle to know the facts, why did he not send one of his clerks?"

"Why, he said, Miss Mary, that he had no right," answered the boy ; "he seemed in a great flurry, and as if he did not well know what to do ; but he asked if I had seen Sir John in town ; for he generally comes to the White Hart, you know ; and told me to let him know if I chanced to meet with him in town, because he wanted to speak with him exceed-

ingly. And then he went on that he did not know that he ought to tell him either; for he had got an execution to take to-morrow, here, and to have a writ against him the first thing to-morrow, and a great deal more that I forget. But he said he was very sorry, and would almost give one of his hands not to have it to do. At last, he said I was not to tell anybody in the town what he had said, but that I might tell Sir John if I saw him, so I came away here, miss, as soon as I could."

"But where is Captain Hayward to be found, then?" asked Miss Clifford. "You must tell us that before we can make up our minds, William."

"I may as well tell you as take you," replied the boy; "but I must go on before, to say you are coming. He is at Ste Gimlet's, with him and my mother, and has been there ever since he shot Mr. Wittingham."

"Oh, I shall not mind going there," cried Isabella; "it will not call for observation from the servants; but if he had been at an inn, it would have been terrible."

Mary Clifford smiled; for she was one of those who valued proprieties *nearly* at their right worth, if not quite. She never violated

them rashly : for no pleasure, or amusement, or mere personal gratification would she transgress rules which society had framed, even though she might think them wrong or foolish ; but with a great object, a good purpose, and a clear heart, she was ready to set them at nought. " I will go very willingly with you, dear Bella," she said. " Captain Hayward went to London, I know, for the express purpose of providing the means of averting this calamity ; but, from some words which he let drop, I fancy he believed that it was not likely to fall upon us so soon. There is no way that I see of aiding your father but by seeing and consulting with this old friend. You said all this would happen early to-morrow, William?" she continued, turning again to the boy.

" As soon as it is light, Miss Mary," replied poor Billy Lamb.

" Oh, Heaven, I will order the carriage directly," said Isabella ; " run on, there's a good lad ! and tell Captain Hayward I am coming. You can tell him why, and all about it."

The boy retired, and sped away by the shortest paths towards his brother-in-law's cottage. In the meanwhile the carriage was

ordered; but Sir John had got the chariot with him; the barouche had not been out for some time; and the coachman thought fit to dust it. Three-quarters of an hour passed ere the lamps were lighted and all was ready, and then a footman with gold-laced hat in hand stood by the side of the vehicle, to hand the ladies in and accompany them. Isabella, however, told him that he would not be wanted, and gave the order to drive to Stephen Gimlet's cottage.

"Ay!" said the footman, as he turned into the house again, "Billy Lamb's mother is there. Now they'll do the young ladies out of a guinea or two, I'll warrant. What fools women are, to be sure!"

While he thus moralized, the carriage rolled slowly on in the dark night, drawn by two tall pursesey horses, and driven by a coachman of the same qualities, neither of whom at all approved of being unexpectedly taken out at that hour of the night; for dinner parties were rare in the neighbourhood of Tarningham Park, balls were rarer still, and Sir John Slingsby was much fonder of seeing what he called a set of jolly fellows at his own house than of going out to find them, so that none of his horses were at all accustomed to trot by candle-light.

Nearly half an hour more elapsed before the carriage entered the quiet lane unaccustomed to the sound of any wheels but those of a wagon or a taxed-cart, and at length the reins were drawn in at the door of the cottage. The house looked unpromising, not a light was to be seen, for, strange to say, window-shutters had been put up to every casement of Stephen Gimlet's dwelling, though one would not have supposed him a man addicted to such luxuries. The coachman felt his dignity hurt at having to descend from the box and open the carriage-door; the respectability of the whole family seemed to suffer in his eyes; but, nevertheless, he did it, and as he did so the horses moved on two or three yards, of which Isabella was glad, for she reflected that if the coachman saw into the cottage, he might see the inmates also. Ere she went in, she told him to drive back to the stile some two hundred yards down the lane, and if the boy Billy Lamb came over—it was his way from Tarningham Park—to keep him with the carriage. Then, with two hearts which, it must be confessed, fluttered sadly, Isabella and Mary knocked at the cottage-door, and scarcely waiting for reply, opened it in haste, and went in. Mary's heart fluttered at

the thought of seeing Ned Hayward, as well as at the feeling of taking a somewhat unusual step; but Isabella's flutter was solely on the latter account till the door was open, and then it became worse than ever on another score.

The first object she saw straight before her was Mr. Beauchamp, who was standing in the midst of the little parlour of the cottage, talking to the poor boy, Billy Lamb, while Mrs. Lamb and Stephen Gimlet were placed near the wide cottage hearth.

The moment that Miss Slingsby's face appeared, Beauchamp turned from the boy, saying,

"Here are the ladies themselves. Now go home, my good boy; and if your master is angry at your absence, tell him I will explain all to him. My dear Miss Slingsby, I am delighted to see you and your fair cousin. The boy says you wish to speak with Captain Hayward. He is in the room above. I will tell him immediately;" and, after shaking hands with both of the ladies, he turned away, and went up-stairs.

Mary whispered eagerly with Isabella; and Stephen Gimlet touched his mother-in-law's arm, as he saw that there was evidently a good

deal of agitation in their fair visitors' manner, saying,

"Come, Goody, it won't give you cold, I dare say, to walk out for a bit with me. They'll want to talk together," he added, in a low voice, "and if it's cold, we'll go into the little vestry of the church."

The old woman looked towards the back-room, where the child was sleeping; but Stephen answered her, ere she spoke, whispering—

"No, no, we should hear it all there."

Goody Lamb put her shawl over her head, while he took down the key of the church; and Mary's eye catching their movements, she said—

"Only for a few minutes, Mrs. Lamb. I should like to speak with you when we have said a word or two to Captain Hayward."

Mrs. Lamb dropped a courtsey, and went out with her son-in-law; and the next moment, a slow step was heard coming down the stairs.

"Good Heaven, you are ill, Captain Hayward," cried Isabella, as her father's friend presented himself, followed by Beauchamp. Mary Clifford said nothing, but she felt more.

"Oh, I shall soon be well again, my dear Miss Slingsby," answered Ned Hayward; "the

ball is out, and I am recovering quite fast—only a little weak.”

“Hayward tells me I shall not be one too many,” said Beauchamp; “but if I am, Miss Slingsby, send me away, remembering, however, that you may command me in any other way as well as that.”

What a difference there is between enterprise and execution! How the difficulties grow upon us at every step of the mountain path, and how faint the heart feels at the early obstacles which we had altogether overlooked. Isabella Slingsby had thought it would be the easiest thing in the world to enter upon the state of her father’s affairs with Ned Hayward. He was so old a friend; he had known her father since he was sixteen years of age; he had himself given the first warning, had opened the way. It had seemed to her, indeed, that there would not be the slightest difficulty, that there could not be any obstacle; but now, when she had to speak of all, her heart sank, her courage failed her; and she strove to turn the conversation to any other subject—only for a moment, till she recovered thought and breath.

“Oh, no! Do not go, Mr. Beauchamp,”

she said. "But how ill Captain Hayward looks. We had no idea he had been wounded. They said that Mr. Wittingham was the only sufferer."

"I can assure you, it is nothing," replied Ned Hayward; "but you must sit down, my dear young lady;" and with his left arm he put a seat for Miss Slingsby, while Beauchamp did the same good office for Mary Clifford. "I am sure that you have something important to say, and I guess what it is," the young officer continued. "Miss Clifford, you told your cousin a very painful communication I made to you ten or twelve days ago. Is it not so? and she has come to speak upon that subject?"

"I did, Captain Hayward," answered Mary Clifford; "I told her all you had said—and your generous and noble offer to assist Sir John in the most pressing emergency. Her own knowledge confirmed in a great degree the fact of great danger; but we feared that this unfortunate duel might have interfered with your plans, and knew not where to find you, or communicate with you."

"I did not forget what I had undertaken," answered Ned Hayward; "but like a thoughtless fool, as I am, I forgot I might be wounded,

Miss Clifford, or that I might be forced to run for it. Well may the good people call me thoughtless Ned Hayward; for I remembered that I might be killed, and provided against it; but I did not recollect anything else, and ordered the money to be remitted to the bank here at Tarningham. The ball went into my shoulder, however, and I have been unable to write ever since; otherwise I would have sent the cheque long ago, to be used whenever it was needed. I hope to be able to write as well as ever in a few days; so put your mind quite at ease upon that score. As for the mortgage, which is, I suppose, in train for immediate foreclosure, we must think what can be done some other way; for I am a poor man, as you know, and have not the means of lending the amount;" and, as he spoke, he turned his eye towards Beauchamp.

Ned Hayward calculated that there would be plenty of time to make all his arrangements; but such fancies were dissipated in a moment by Isabella's reply:—

"Did not the boy tell you," she asked, "that everything you feared is to take place to-morrow? He came up to warn us. That good little man, Bacon, the attorney, sent him."

"No, Isabella," said Mary Clifford, "he did not exactly send him; but he told him the facts, evidently that they might reach my uncle's ears; and the boy came up to tell us. I was sure, Captain Hayward," she added, with a glowing cheek, "that you would do what you could to aid, and that, if you could not aid, you would advise us how to act. We therefore came on here, without hesitation; for no time is to be lost, and Sir John is unfortunately out at dinner."

"Very luckily, rather," said Ned Hayward. "No time, indeed, is to be lost, *if* such be the state of things. I must write the cheque at once, some way or another. There is a pen and ink in my little room, I will go and get it."

"But can you write?" asked Mary, anxiously; "can you, without injury to yourself?"

"Nay, stay, Hayward, stay," said Beauchamp; "you mentioned the subject of the mortgage to me the other day. What is the amount? can you tell?"

"About fifty thousand pounds, and Heaven only knows how much interest," answered Ned Hayward; "for I do not think Sir John has any idea."

"Nay, then I fear you must write the cheque,"

said Beauchamp, gravely; "for I must not diminish the amount in the bank; but I will get the pen and ink. We are a sort of prisoners here, Miss Slingsby, and dare not show ourselves till Mr. Wittingham's state is better ascertained, or we should long ago have endeavoured to put your mind at rest upon these subjects. However, we hear the young man is better, and therefore I trust we shall not be obliged to play at hide and seek much longer."

Thus saying, he went up the stairs again, but was several minutes ere he returned, during which time, though occasionally falling into fits of grave thought, Ned Hayward laughed and talked gaily; from time to time stealing a quiet look at the fair face of Mary Clifford, as she leaned her arm upon the table, and gazed somewhat sadly at the embers of the game-keeper's fire.

At length Mr. Beauchamp made his appearance once more; and sitting down to the table with a cheque-book before him, Ned Hayward, with a laugh, took the pen in his hand, saying,

"I must dash it off in haste, or it will be pronounced a forgery. So here is for it," and with a rapid stroke or two he filled up the cheque for the sum of twelve thousand pounds,

and signed his name. His cheek turned pale as he wrote; and Mary Clifford saw it, but that was the only sign of pain which he suffered to appear. Then, throwing down the pen, he took the paper with his left hand, and gave it to Miss Slingsby.

"There," he said, "I have had you on my knee twelve years ago, and called you dear little Bella; but I never thought you would give me so much pleasure as you do now."

"Well, Ned Hayward," exclaimed Isabella, with her eyes running over, "you are certainly the best and noblest creature in the world."

Mary Clifford's lips murmured something very like "He is."

Beauchamp looked on with an expression of grave pleasure; but scarcely was the cheque signed and given, when the door of the cottage opened suddenly, and Stephen Gimlet took a step over the threshold, saying—

"I have caught him, gentlemen; I have caught him, like a rat in a trap."

"Whom have you caught?" asked Beauchamp, turning quickly towards him.

"Why the fellow who fired the shot in at the window," answered Stephen Gimlet.

"That is glorious!" exclaimed Ned Hay-

ward. "Where is he? What have you done with him?"

"I should not have troubled him, perhaps," said the gamekeeper, "if I had not found him meddling with the registers in the church, which I know he has no right to do. I and Goody Lamb went out for a bit into the churchyard, and, as she found the wind cold, we opened the little door at this side of the church and went in. I had not been in a minute, when I heard some talking plain enough; but I could not see anybody for the life of me. I told Goody Lamb to stand behind the pillar by the pulpit, while I went to see; but before I could take a step, up out of the Moreton vault came two men with a lantern. One of them was this fellow, and the other was the old sexton; and they walked straight across towards the vestry; but, just a little way from the door, the old sexton stopped and said, 'I can't, Captain; it is nothing better than forgery,' or something like that; and the other fellow took the lantern and went on into the vestry. So I said to Goody Lamb, in a whisper, 'Those rascals are up to no good;' and she answered, 'One of them never was, all his life.' So, then I said, 'You get forward and scare the old sexton; I'll

be close behind you.' The old woman did it in a minute, walking on without any noise, till she was right between him and the light that came out of the vestry-door. However, he had heard us whisper, I fancy ; for he was staring about him, as if he was looking for a ghost ; and, as soon as he saw something stand there, off he set, as if the devil were behind him ; and I jumped into the vestry, where the other fellow was sitting with one of the great books open before him, and a pen in his hand. I did not give him much time to think, but knocked him over, upset the lantern, and locked the door. So there he is in a cage, just like one of my ferrets."

"That's capital !" cried Ned Hayward ; but Beauchamp looked very grave, and, turning to Gimlet, he said—

"We'll consider what is to be done with him by and by. You can bring your good mother-in-law back now, Stephen ; for our business is nearly over, and then you can see these two ladies safe to the carriage. Miss Slingsby," continued he, as soon as the gamekeeper was gone, "I wish to speak two words with you regarding this little note ;" and he held one up before her. "I took advantage of the

pen and ink before I brought it down, and so kept you waiting, I'm afraid; but it was not without a purpose."

Isabella hesitated for a moment; but Beauchamp added, laughing—

"Nay, surely, you will trust yourself with me as far as the door."

"Oh, yes," replied Isabella, with a gay toss of her head; "for I am doing all kinds of odd things to-night, and see no reason for stopping in mid course."

Thus saying, she walked towards the door, with Beauchamp following; and they went out into the little garden, where Beauchamp put the note into her hand, saying—

"This is addressed to Dr. Miles, my dear young lady. We are not very well aware of what has taken place regarding this mortgage, which Hayward has mentioned to me; but I fear there is some foul play going on. Should any sudden inconvenience arise regarding it, or the interest upon it, send that note instantly to Dr. Miles, and, at the same time, take means to let me know."

"But how, my kind friend," asked Isabella, "how can I let you know, without discovering your place of concealment to others? You are,

doubtless, aware that there are placards all over the place, offering a reward for the apprehension of yourself and Captain Hayward?"

"We must not mind that," answered Beauchamp; "I must take my measures afterwards, as I find best. In the meantime, Dr. Miles will insure that your father is put to no inconvenience; for it so luckily happens, that I have a large sum unemployed at the present moment, which could not be better applied than by saving you from distress and annoyance."

"Oh, Mr. Beauchamp," cried Isabella, greatly moved, "what right have I to so much kindness and generosity?"

"Every right that a fine and noble heart can give," answered Beauchamp; "and, oh, let me add, every right that can be bestowed by the most sincere affection that ever woman inspired in man—but I will not agitate you more to-night. This is not a moment when I can press such a topic upon you. There is only one thing you must promise, that you will suffer no consideration whatever to prevent you from availing yourself of the means of freeing your father from his difficulties—no, not even the rash words I have just spoken."

Isabella was silent for a moment; but then she replied, in a low voice—

“Those words would have quite the contrary effect. They would give me confidence and hope;” and she put her hand in his.

Beauchamp raised it to his lips, warmly, fully understanding all that her reply implied.

The devil is in a country apothecary. There is an awkward fatality about them which always brings them on the ground at the wrong moment.

“Good night—good night, Mr. Beauchamp,” said Mr. Slattery of Tarningham, slowly walking his horse down the sandy lane. “I thought I would just step in to see Captain Hayward, and tell you that Harry Wittingham is much better to-night;” and Mr. Slattery was dismounting from his horse, not in the slightest degree with the intention of seeing whose hand Mr. Beauchamp had been kissing, but merely in the exercise of his professional avocations. As misfortune would have it, Beauchamp had left the cottage-door open behind him, so that the surgeon had a fair view of the act by which that gentleman had sealed his tacit contract with Isabella, by the light which streamed forth

from within. But that which was unfortunate on one side, was fortunate on another; for no sooner was the first monosyllable out of Mr. Slattery's mouth, than Isabella darted in and closed the door, so that the surgeon, though he thought the figure strangely like Sir John's daughter, could not swear to the fact.

Beauchamp, at the same time, hastened to prevent his obtaining any more precise knowledge, saying, "Thank you for your information, Mr. Slattery. Hayward is better, and cannot see you to-night, being particularly engaged at present. Good night!" and he also retired into the house, and shut the door.

"Ho, ho!" said Mr. Slattery, "so they do not choose me to see! Well, let them take the consequences. When people trust me, I can be as silent as the grave; but if they show a want of confidence, I know how to match them. Did I whisper one word to any one of where the two gentlemen were? No, not a word!—and now they think to blind me. Well, well! we shall see."

And Mr. Slattery did see, for while this soliloquy had been going on, he had been going on too, and when it came to a conclusion, he

came upon the lamps of the large, comfortable barouche of Sir John Slingsby.

“Good evening, Jenkins,” said Mr. Slattery, to the tall, fat coachman. “Is Sir John in this part, that you are out so late?”

“No, Sir,” replied Jenkins, “he’s got the charritt over at Meadowfield. I brought my young lady to see Widow Lamb, at Gimlet’s the new keeper’s.”

“Ho, ho!” said Mr. Slattery, again; but he had not time to make reflections, for at the very moment he heard a pair of human feet running hard, and the next instant a figure shot across the glare of the carriage-lamps. Mr. Slattery had a quick eye, and he instantly called after the runner, “Hie! hie! Captain, I want to speak with you!”

But the person whom he addressed ran on; and as Mr. Slattery did not choose to be so evaded, he struck his plated spurs into his horse’s side, and overtook the fugitive at the distance of a quarter of a mile; for, once past the stile where the carriage stood, there was no possible means of getting out of the high-banked lane.

“Hie, Captain!—Captain Moreton!” cried

Mr. Slattery, as he came near; and Moreton, not at all liking to have his name shouted all over the country, slackened his pace.

“What the devil do you want, Slattery?” he asked; “do you not see I’m in a hurry?”

“There’s my little account, you know, Captain,” said Mr. Slattery, “four years standing, and you’d really oblige me very much if——”

“Devil fly away with your account!” said the worthy Captain; “do you think I’m going to pay for all the physic you drugged the maid-servants with, at the hall?”

“Have you heard the news, Captain?” exclaimed Mr. Slattery, coming abruptly to the real point, as he perceived the other was going to run again.

“No; what news?” asked Moreton, pausing.

“Why, that Miss Slingsby is going to be married immediately to Mr. Beauchamp, who has been staying down here so long,” answered Mr. Slattery; and then added, “as soon as young Wittingham’s out of all danger, they say.”

“Is she, by ——!” exclaimed the Captain. “Well, doctor, I shall take the short cut through that gate—good night; and do not

say to any one you saw me here. I know you can be trusted with a secret."

"To be sure !" said Mr. Slattery ; and while Captain Moreton vaulted over the gate, the surgeon pursued his way towards Tarningham.

CHAPTER II.

SIR JOHN SLINGSBY returned to Tarningham Park at about the hour of "dark midnight;" but he found both daughter and niece still up to receive him. That Sir John Slingsby had imbibed a portion of wine more abundant than most men could carry discreetly, was evident from the increased depth of the rose in his complexion, and from a certain watery lustre in his eyes; but it must not thence be inferred that the baronet was even in the least degree drunk. How many he had left drunk behind him matters not to this history; but he himself, though gay as usual, was perfectly sober, quite gentlemanly and at his ease; for he had not even arrived at that pitch where a con-

sciousness of wine makes one careful of not showing its effects.

"Well, young ladies," he said, seating himself in his arm-chair for a moment, and sticking his thumb into his white waistcoat; "you have passed a dull night, I dare say, with the old gentleman out, and the two young gentlemen Lord knows where! Well, how are we to wear away to-morrow?"

"I shall wear away the morning, my dear uncle," said Mary Clifford, who had held long councils with her cousin, "in going to Tarningham; and I will ask you to lend me the carriage for an hour at eight o'clock"

"Certainly, dear Mary," said the baronet; "but Tarningham! what takes your pretty little self to Tarningham."

"Why, the truth is, I want some money," answered Miss Clifford. "I think the bank opens at half-past eight."

"Money in the bank!" cried Sir John Slingsby; "was there ever such a girl? She has money in the bank! Well, take the carriage, Mary, when you like, and be back to breakfast at half-past nine, otherwise you shall have cold tea, and not a bit of pasty. Now to bed—to bed: for if people have to go to Tarningham

early in the morning, they must go to bed at night."

The breakfast-table was laid, as usual, by nine o'clock in the morning; but before that hour Isabella Slingsby had been down, and had wandered about in the drawing-room and in the library, with a nervous sort of unsettledness in her manner, which struck even the servants who happened to pass. She looked out of almost every window in the house which was accessible to her; she gazed down every road that wound through the park; she scanned every moving figure that was within the range of sight; and she felt every moment a terror of what the next would bring, which she had never experienced in life before. She wished that Mary had not left her, that they had sent some one for the money; and she conjured up prospective difficulties and distresses, obstacles that she would not know how to meet, questions of law and form of which she was unaware, to trouble herself and agitate her mind still more. At length, with a bold resolution, she rang the bell, and ordered the servant who appeared to go down to Doctor Miles's, with her compliments, and say she would be glad to see him. The moment after, her father

entered the room, as gay, as bustling, as jovial as ever; his face resplendent with small red veins; his eyes sparkling like the wine of the night before; his ample stomach rolling unrepressed under an easy waistcoat; and his stout legs and neat foot carrying him about with the light step of one-and-twenty. To have looked at him, one would have thought that there was not such a thing as care or sorrow in the world, much less in his own house.

“Ah, Bella!” he cried, kissing her, “how have you slept, my love?—Where’s Mary?—not come back? How’s your aunt?—pining, pining, eh?—see what comes of a melancholy constitution, too much bile and twenty years’ trial of a puritanical husband! Well, what’s o’clock?—five-and-twenty minutes after nine—come along, we’ll have breakfast. Mary shall have a fresh pot of tea when she comes;” and in went Sir John Slingsby to the breakfast-room, ringing the bell as if he would have pulled it down the moment he got in.

“Breakfast!” he exclaimed, when the butler appeared. “Has not the post-bag come?”

“No, Sir John,” replied the man.

“Very late,” said the baronet; and, marching to the window, he looked out upon the

sunshiny park, with his hands behind him, for want of better occupation.

To poor Isabella Slingsby, her father's lively unconsciousness was terrible ; and it was with trembling hands that she made the tea and poured out the coffee, giving a sharp look round every time the door opened, as if in expectation of some grim bailiff's face appearing. Such, indeed, would have been the case, had it not been that good Mr. Bacon had contrived to delay what he could not prevent ; and at length, much to the joy and satisfaction of Isabella, the grating sound of carriage-wheels was heard from the park. That sound was still distant and indistinct, however, when the butler came in with a very peculiar and significant expression of countenance, saying, "Please, Sir John, there's a man wants to speak with you."

"Well, he must wait," said Sir John Slingsby. "Tell him I am at breakfast—has not the post-bag come yet?"

"Please, Sir John, the man says he must speak with you directly."

"Tell him to go to the devil," said Sir John Slingsby, "and speak with him;" but the words were scarcely out of his mouth, when the door

opened behind the butler, and not one man, but two, appeared.

Isabella's face had been very pale from the first announcement made by the servant ; but Sir John had remained perfectly unconscious till he saw those two strange faces. They were anything but pleasant faces in the abstract, for though well washed and shaved, there was a ruffianly dirt of expression, which no soap could get rid of. There are certain professions which stamp themselves upon the outer man in indelible lines. The bailiff—the man who makes his bread or his fortune by inflicting the most poignant misery the law knows upon his fellow-creatures—the step in society still lower than the hangman—is never to be mistaken ; and Sir John Slingsby recognised at once the errand of his intrusive visitors in their aspect. His face became very pale, the red veins turned blue ; and he sat at the table without uttering a word. He well knew that these men's appearance, though bad enough in itself, was but the commencement of evils ; that the long delayed hour was come ; that the thin worn line which upheld his whole fortunes had snapped, and that he was now to fall into the gulf of ruin which had so long yawned beneath him.

Arrested and carried from his house, every creditor would pour in with his claims, every debt be swelled by law expenses, till nought would be left for him and for his child, but a prison and a life of labour.

His careless heart sank with the weight suddenly cast upon it; and his brain was overpowered with the multitude of thoughts it had resisted too long.

But Isabella stepped in like an angel of comfort; her heart rose as his fell. The moment of terror passed away; and, as the foremost of the two men laid his hand lightly upon Sir John's shoulder, she whispered in his ear "Do not alarm yourself, my dear father. Mary has gone to Tarningham for the money. We heard of all this last night, and are quite prepared. She will be here in a moment—I hear the carriage coming up now."

"At whose suit, and for what amount?" demanded Sir John Slingsby, turning to the bailiff. He could say no more, for some moments were required to collect his thoughts.

"At Mr. Wittingham's, Sir John," replied the man, "for five thousand three hundred and forty-two pounds seven and fourpence."

"Then you may tell Mr. Wittingham for

me," said Sir John Slingsby, "that he is a d—d shabby, sneaking scoundrel, to do such a thing as this without giving me some notice."

"Come, come, Sir John," rejoined the bailiff, "you know it is no use talking—you must come along, you know."

"You are somewhat too quick, sir," said Isabella, interposing; "if you mean to say the debt must be paid, that is very well. It shall be paid."

"Ay, miss; but it must be paid immediately, or Sir John must march," answered the man, screwing his eye at his follower; "gammon is gammon, you know."

"I do not understand what you mean," said Isabella, haughtily.—"Pray, papa, do not touch him" (for Sir John had risen, with fury in his countenance)—"the debt shall be paid immediately, as you say."

"And you shall be ducked in the horse-pond for your insolence," added the Baronet,—continuing to the butler, "Call in all the men!"

"Nay, nay—do not, my dear father!" cried Isabella. "Five thousand three hundred and forty pounds, you said?" she continued, addressing the bailiff,—"I will bring the money this moment."

"Forty-two, seven, and four," said the man, sullenly; "but there may be detainers, and as the caption is made, I fancy I cannot——"

"Oh, I'll soon settle that!" said Sir John Slingsby. "You see, my good fellow, there are several windows to this room, as well as doors—I do not resist the law—wouldn't resist the law for the world!—but as soon as the money is paid, you go out of either windows or doors, as you please; but speedily, in either case. Get the money, Bella—call the men here!" he added, speaking sharply to the butler; "I see we shall want them."

Isabella hastened out of the room, for the carriage had just drawn up; and as she entered the vestibule, she saw Mary stepping lightly out of it, with a calm smile. "Have you got it?" cried Isabella, in eager haste; "they are here already."

"Indeed!" said Mary, sadly; "I am sorry for that. But there was some difficulty; for at the bank, as the sum was so large, they wanted proof of Captain Hayward's signature, which they did not well know. I could not tell what to do, and therefore went to Mr. Bacon's, who soon settled the matter."

“Why, the writ was taken out by him,” cried Isabella.

“Yes, I know,” answered her cousin; “but he told me how sorry he was to be forced by Mr. Wittingham to do it; and explained that it would be much better to pay the money at once in Tarningham, when he would give me a receipt in full, and an order, or something, to these men, so as to stop anything unpleasant at once—for he thought I should get back before they arrived. He said there would be a great object gained in paying the money at once, so that the receipt might be dated before what he called the *caption*.”

“And did you do it?” asked Isabella, eagerly—“did you do it, dearest Mary?”

“Yes!” answered her cousin, half alarmed. “I really believe he is a very honest little man; and he seemed truly distressed at Mr. Wittingham’s conduct. He gave me the receipt, and the order, too; and took great pains to date them half-past eight, though it was nearly nine. I hope I have not done wrong, Isabella?”

“Oh dear, no! I dare say it is all quite right,” cried Isabella, joyfully. “Give them to me, Mary, and let me run back; for I am afraid of

what my father calls 'an affair of posts,' between him and these bailiffs. I left him marvellously pugnacious."

Mary Clifford put into her hand the two papers which she had received in Tarningham, and at the same time drew forth a small bundle of bank-notes, saying, "There is the rest of the twelve thousand pounds — for Heaven's sake, take care of it, Isabella!"

Her cousin gazed at the little packet with a gay smile; and then tossing her head, with the joy of a light heart relieved from a heavy load, she ran back into the breakfast-room, while Mary went up stairs, to lay aside her shawl and bonnet.

At the door of the room where she had left her father, Isabella resumed a calm and composed air; and entering with a stately step, found five or six men-servants arranged across the end of the chamber, while the two bailiffs stood looking somewhat crest-fallen and apprehensive near Sir John, who, for his part, sat beating a tune on the breakfast-table with his fingers, and endeavouring to appear unconcerned. A sharp, anxious glance at his daughter's face, however, told that all fear was not at an end; but her confident look re-assured

him, and he exclaimed, "Well, Bella, have you brought the money?"

"Yes," replied Miss Slingsby, and approaching the table, she laid down the roll of bank-notes, spread them out, and began to count—"One thousand, two thousand, three, four, five, six thousand;" she said aloud, much to the astonishment and admiration of the servants.

"That is more than enough, madam," said the bailiff, approaching with humbled air and smooth tone.

"I know it is," replied Isabella: "be so good as to keep your hands away, sir; for you are not going to have one penny of that sum. I was only counting to see that the amount was right. That paper, I think, will be quite enough for you; and that, my dear father, is the receipt for the whole sum and costs to Mr. Wittingham."

"Well, ma'am, well, I've nothing to say," exclaimed the bailiff; "it is all in order. However, I have only done my duty; and am very glad the matter is so settled."

"Done your duty, you vagabond!" cried Sir John Slingsby, "done only your duty, when you ventured to use the word 'gammon' to my daughter—but it does not matter—it does not

matter ! Get out of my sight as fast as possible, and tell that fellow Wittingham to keep far off me, for, as sure as I am alive, I will horsewhip him the first time I see him—take care of them, my men, and see them safe off the grounds.”

The words certainly did not imply any very formidable menace ; but as such the bailiff and his follower seemed to understand them, and made speed towards the door, while the men-servants answered “ That we will, Sir John ; ” but made way for the two unwelcome visitors to effect their exit easily. Isabella remonstrated earnestly with her father ; but the jovial baronet only exclaimed, “ Pooh ! nonsense, Bella ; no harm can happen, I must see what goes on ; for, with a fair start and a good run, it would be capital fun. Come into the library—come into the library, we shall have the best view there ; and after that we will breakfast.”

Isabella Slingsby, however, remained alone in the breakfast-room, gazing down upon the notes spread out on the table. The eagerness, the excitement of the moment was gone. The anxious fear for her father’s liberty was over. Something smote her heart—even the little display of the money before the eyes of the

servants and the bailiffs, she was sorry for. Considerations presented themselves which she had never thought of before; and when her cousin Mary entered the room a few minutes after, Isabella cast her arm round her neck, and bending her head upon her shoulder, said, with a blush on her cheek and tears in her eyes, "Poor Ned Hayward, Mary, I have thought too little of him; and he is not rich, I know."

"Do not be afraid, Isabella," said Mary, in a low tone.

"But I *am* afraid, Mary," rejoined Isabella. "I know my father is terribly embarrassed—I fear he will never be able to repay this sum."

"Then I will," said Mary Clifford.

CHAPTER III.

WE must go back to Stephen Gimlet's cottage and the preceding night. Beauchamp and Captain Hayward stood together by the table, when their two fair visitors had left them, waiting for the return of the gamekeeper, and they both remained silent for several minutes. There are times, when great things just accomplished, of whatever kind, or character, seem to oppress the spirit and keep it down, as it were, under a heavy weight. Nor is it altogether uninteresting to inquire what is the cause of this oppression—the remote, often unseen, ever indistinct cause. It is not sorrow, it is not regret; for the weight of thought seems cast upon us as often by a joyful as a sorrowful

event; and I speak not at all of the effect of misfortune, but simply of that which is produced upon the mind by a great deed done—great, at least, to the person who has performed it. I am inclined to think, that the sort of load which I speak of, may be traced to the consciousness of all the vast multitude of consequences of which every act is the source. The slightest thing we do sends a thrill vibrating along the endless chains of cause and effect to the utmost limit of time through the whole grand machine of future existence. Man dies, but not one of his acts ever dies, each perpetuated and prolonged for ever by interminable results, affecting some beings in every age to come. Ay, even the slightest; but that which is to follow only becomes a question with man when the deed is to his own cognizance important as affecting himself and those around him. The eye of God sees all; but it is merely when the consequences are visible to our own limited ken, that we feel the strange involution of our destiny with that of others; and, when what we have just done is in its immediate results likely to affect us and those we love profoundly, that we pause to consider all the wide extent of the future which that act implies. Then we feel as if we

had plunged headlong into an ocean of endless waves ; and the weight of the waters oppresses the heart and spirit. We ask, what next ? and then, what will follow ? And, in the game of chess that we are playing against Fate, look for the next move of our great adversary, and all the consequences of that which we have ourselves just made.

Both Beauchamp and Hayward had done an important thing that night. The latter had stripped himself for a friend's benefit of the treasured resource of after-life. Never rich, he had left himself but a scanty pittance which was not likely to be increased by any means but his own personal exertions. From that moment, he felt that his course of life must be changed, that his views, his feelings, his habits, must undergo a severe scrutiny, and be subjected to a hard discipline ; that the careless ease, the light-hearted indifference to the morrow was at an end ; that the small cares he had never yet known, the looking to shillings and to pence, and all the sordid minutiae of difficult economy, were to be his companions for life, as inseparable from his footsteps as his shadow. Honest poverty may be a very fine thing in contemplation, but let its admirers understand

that it is a difficult thing in practice; for honesty and poverty are like Adam and the Devil in the garden, ill-suited tenants of one house, the latter of whom is always laying out snares to reduce his companion to his own level. If such be the case where the circumstances of birth have made the evils of poverty habitual, and given its temptations no factitious advantages, how much more is it so, when a knowledge of, a taste for, and a long education in ease and comfort, have both engendered a habit of expense, and rendered the restraints of poverty privations. It is then that honesty has to struggle with a host of foes, and too often a murder and suicide are committed; honesty killing itself after an attempt to get rid of its comrade.

But Ned Hayward was a very honest man, and his first thought was how to bear his poverty rightly. He gave not one thought to the money he had just given away—for so he believed it to be—he would have performed the same act over and over again a dozen times if he had had the means and the motives to do so; and would each time have done it willingly; but that did not prevent his feeling the painful situation in which he had left himself; and he

contemplated with deep thought and stern resolution all that was to issue from the deed he had done.

With Beauchamp, the feelings might be different, but the sources from which they sprang were the same. He, too, had taken a step which was to influence the whole of his future life. He had said words to Isabella Slingsby, of which he felt all the import at the moment they were spoken—which he spoke purposely; that there might be no doubt or hesitation on her mind in regard to his sensations or purposes, and yet which, as soon as they were uttered, filled him with a vague feeling of apprehension. Yet Beauchamp was a resolute man in character, and had performed acts of persisting resolution which few men would have had the determination to carry through. He loved Isabella, too, dearly; and had the whole world been subject to his choice, he would have selected her. He was anxious, likewise, to call her his own; for he was not without the fire of passion, and was very different from those idle triflers, in whom love is a vanity lighted up by the cold *ignis fatuus* of a volatile and fugitive desire. But his previous history furnished materials for doubt and alarm;

and when he paused to contemplate all the innumerable consequences of the few words he had spoken, there was a mist over one part of that sea of many waves, the future,—and he asked himself, with awe, “What is beneath?” The thought, however, that he was loved in return, was consolation and courage; and though, for his part, Ned Hayward did not venture to indulge in any such sweet dream, yet the image of Mary Clifford, like that of the Virgin in the old legend, shed a light which dispelled the darkness along one bright path, through the obscure future, for him also.

The contemplations of both gentlemen, however, were speedily broken through by the return of Ste Gimlet, who, turning to Mr. Beauchamp, inquired,—

“Please, sir, what shall we do with the man locked up in the vestry?”

“Oh, have him out!” cried Ned Hayward, “and hand him over to a constable.”

Beauchamp did not reply so quickly; but at length, he said—

“There may be difficulty, Hayward, in finding a constable at this time of night; and not only difficulty, but also danger to ourselves, if we take any part in the business. Is the place

where the man is confined secure?" he continued, addressing the gamekeeper.

"Pretty well, sir, I think," answered Gimlet; "there are bars to the windows, and the door is locked tight enough. Then we can lock the church door, too."

"I locked it, Stephen," said Mrs. Lamb; "there hangs the key."

"Then let him stay there the night," rejoined Beauchamp; "I will not interfere to screen him; and Gimlet can get a constable early to-morrow morning, without our taking any part in the affair."

This proposal was agreed to by Ned Hayward, though the expression which his friend used, in regard to screening the offender, struck him as somewhat strange. It is wonderful, however, how often in life we do what is vulgarly termed, reckon without our host. The two gentlemen retired to rest in the rooms above, which had been prepared and furnished for them in haste, since the duel with young Wittingham; and Stephen Gimlet and Widow Lamb also sought repose. Early the next morning, however, the gamekeeper rose to seek a constable; but first he thought it expedient to look at the temporary prison in

which he had confined Captain Moreton. The doors, both of church and vestry, were still closed and locked; but passing round towards his own cottage again, by a little grass-grown path, that ran under the church walls, Ste Gimlet was surprised and confounded to perceive that three of the bars covering the window of the vestry had been forced out of the old mortar in which they had been socketed; and jumping up on a tombstone to look in, he soon saw that the bird had taken wing from its cage.

Stephen Gimlet, notwithstanding this discovery, did not return to his cottage at once, to communicate the intelligence to those within. He paused, and thought; but, to say truth, it was not of the event which he had just ascertained that he meditated. That was done and over: the man was gone, and might never be caught again; but the words which Beauchamp had spoken the night before had made a deeper impression upon his mind than they had upon Ned Hayward's, and naturally, for the young officer had never remarked or heard anything before which could lead his fancy to perceive any connexion between his friend and Captain Moreton. Stephen Gimlet, on the contrary,

had observed much that excited his imagination, and it was one of a very active character. He remembered the interest which Beauchamp had displayed in the monuments of the Moreton family; he remembered all the inquiries he had made regarding their former property; and he did not forget either his mother-in-law's ancient connexion with one of the members of that house, or the somewhat mysterious expressions she had used in regard to Beauchamp himself. It was a tangled skein, difficult to unravel, but yet he resolved to unravel it; not exactly from curiosity, though curiosity might have some share therein, but rather because, in his wild fancy, he dreamed that the knowledge which Goody Lamb possessed of his guest's previous history might afford him some means of serving a man he looked upon as his benefactor. He was peculiarly susceptible of kindness or unkindness, of gratitude or its reverse, resentment; and he thought that it would be a happy day for him, if he could ever return to Mr. Beauchamp, even in a small degree, the kindness he had received. He pondered upon these things for full five minutes, and then returned to his cottage, where he found the old lady in the inner room,

making the little boy repeat a short prayer at his bed-side, after having washed and dressed him. It was a sweet and wholesome sight to the father. He contrasted it with former days, and he felt the balmy influence of honest peace pour over his heart. One of the first rewards of a return to virtue from any of man's many deviations, is an appreciation of its excellence. He stood and gazed, and listened well satisfied, while the words of holy prayer rose up from the sweet tongue of his own child; and if the boy had prayed for his father's confirmation in his return to right, the petition could not have been more fully granted.

When it was done, Ste Gimlet kissed the child, and sent him out to play in the little garden. Then, shaking hands with Widow Lamb, he said—

“I wanted to ask you a question or two, Goody. Do you know who the man is that rushed into the vestry last night?”

“To be sure I do,” answered the widow; “do you think, Stephen, I could forget one I have seen in such times, and known in such acts as that man? No, no; I shall remember him to my dying day.”

“Well, then,” replied her son-in-law, “I

want you to tell me, goody, what there is between him and Mr. Beauchamp; for the man has got out and is off, and I have great doubts that he is Mr. Beauchamp's friend."

"I had better hold my tongue, Stephen," said the old woman—"I had better hold my tongue, at least till I see and understand more. One thing at least I may say, and say truly, that the bitterest enemy ever Mr. Beauchamp had was that Captain Moreton."

"Do you think, Widow Lamb," asked the gamekeeper, in a low, stern tone, "that he has any cause to wish Mr. Beauchamp dead?"

The old woman started, and gazed at him, demanding—

"What makes you ask that?"

"I'll tell you, widow," replied the man. "Have you not heard of a shot fired into Sir John Slingsby's dining-room? Well, that shot went within a few inches of Mr. Beauchamp's head, and that is the man who fired it."

The old woman sank down on the stool by the bedside, and clasped her hands together, exclaiming—

"Is it come to that! Ay, I thought it would, sooner or later. He could not stop—no, no, he could not stop!"

She paused for a moment, and rocked herself backwards and forwards upon the seat, with a pained and bewildered look.

"I see how it is, goody," said Gimlet; "and now I'll tell you. That fellow shan't get off. I'll never give it up till I've caught him. I'll track him, like a hare, to his form, and he shall be punished. Mr. Beauchamp has been kind to me—one of the first that ever were; and I'll not forget kindness, though I'll try to forget unkindness."

"Take care what you are about, Stephen," answered his mother-in-law, "or you may do harm instead of good. Watch him, if you will, to prevent mischief; and, above all, let me know everything that you see and hear. I will talk with Mr. Beauchamp, as you call him, this very day. I wonder if the woman is living!"

"There was one woman with this man, at all events," answered Stephen Gimlet, "when he was down here last."

"Ah! what was she like?" inquired Widow Lamb, eagerly—"what was she like?"

"I only saw her for a minute," replied the gamekeeper; "but she seemed a fine handsome lady as one could wish to see—somewhat reddish in the face; but with fine, dark eyes,

and mighty gaily dressed. She was tall, too, for a woman."

"Yes, her eyes were dark enough," said Widow Lamb; "and she was always fond of fine clothes—that was her ruin; but red in the face!—that is strange; she had the finest and the fairest skin I ever saw."

"Well, the redness might come from drink," said Ste Gimlet; "for she seemed to me half drunk then. He called her Charlotte, I recollect."

"Ay, that's her name," exclaimed the widow; "and so they have come together again? It is for no good, I will answer; for two bolder or worse spirits never met to plot mischief."

"You had better tell me all about it, goody," said Stephen Gimlet; "do something to that fellow, I will, and it's bad to work in the dark."

"Not till I have spoken to the gentleman upstairs," said the old woman. "Watch the man, Stephen: find out where he is—what he is doing—all about him, and about her, too; but do not meddle with him yet. Hark! they are coming down. You go away, and I will talk with him this very day."

"I must tell them he has got out, before I

go," answered the gamekeeper, going into the other room, and bolting the outer door, to guard against intrusion while the two lodgers were below.

No one, however, appeared but Beauchamp, whose first words were—

"I wish, Stephen, you would send some one down to Tarningham, to tell Mr. Slattery to come up. Captain Hayward is not so well this morning, and says he has not slept all night."

"I will go myself, sir," said Gimlet; "but I just wanted to tell you that Captain Moreton has got out during the night. He has wrenched out three of the bars of the window, and is off."

Beauchamp mused.

"Well, it does not much matter," he said, at length; "but you had better inform Doctor Miles of what you saw in the church, and let him take whatever steps he may think necessary to insure that no fraud has been committed. I can have nothing to do with the affair. Bring up Mr. Slattery as soon as you can, for I am somewhat anxious about Captain Hayward's state this morning."

Gimlet did not reply. He uttered no expression of sorrow or of sympathy; but yet he felt as much grieved and alarmed as if Ned

Hayward had been his brother ; and his countenance showed it, though his words did not.

As soon as he was gone, Mr. Beauchamp was turning to go upstairs again ; but Widow Lamb came out of the inner room, and stopped him, saying—

“ I wish to speak a word or two to you, sir.”

“ Well, my good lady,” answered Beauchamp, with a smile, “ can I do anything to serve you?”

“ No, sir,” replied the old woman, “ it is not that. But I see you do not recollect me—and, indeed, how should you ! It is a long time since we first met.”

Beauchamp gazed at her for a moment in silence, and then said—

“ I think I do remember having seen you somewhere before I met you here. Your face struck me as familiar to my recollection when first I saw you ; but I cannot remember where I saw it. Were you ever in India?”

“ Oh ! no, my lord, it was not there,” answered Widow Lamb ; “ when first I saw you, you were quite a young gentleman ; the Honourable Charles St. Leger, they called you ; and you had come down with Captain Moreton,

your cousin, to shoot on the grounds of his great aunt, Miss Moreton."

Beauchamp's face turned somewhat pale, and his fine broad brow contracted; but he did not speak, and the old woman continued—

"Do you not recollect, my lord, Davie Lamb, the grieve, as they called him, and your coming down with a gay party to the grieve's house, one day? It was the eleventh of August, twelve years ago this summer; and the lady was with you, Miss Charlotte Hay, as they called her——"

"Hush! hush!" cried Beauchamp, almost fiercely; "do not mention her name in my hearing. You do not know—you do not know, good woman——"

"Oh, yes, my lord, I do," answered Widow Lamb; "I know more than you think—more than you know, perhaps, yourself. I can tell you many things about her."

"Tell me nothing," said Beauchamp, sternly; "you can say nothing of her conduct, infamous and bad, that I do not know or do not guess. I wish never to hear her name again;" and he turned once more towards the stairs.

"Well, I beg your pardon, my lord," said

Widow Lamb, with a disappointed look, "I did not mean to vex you, but if ever you should wish to hear more, I can tell you better than any one; for there is nobody now living knows so much as I do, and I think——"

The conclusion of her sentence was wanting, for some one opened the cottage door, which had not been bolted since Stephen Gimlet had gone out. The next moment, the head of Mr. Slattery appeared, and entering with an insinuating smile, the worthy surgeon saluted Beauchamp reverentially, saying—

"I met my good friend Wolf, Mr. Beauchamp, and was sorry to hear that Captain Hayward is not so well. But I have got good news for him, and you too. No more need of playing at bo-peep. I found Mr. Wittingham so much better this morning, that I have ventured publicly to pronounce him out of danger."

"Thank God for that!" said Beauchamp; "but we had better go up and see Hayward, who seems to me somewhat feverish."

"I am afraid there is a bit of the wadding, or the coat, or something still in the wound," said Mr. Slattery, following Beauchamp up

stairs, "but there is no cause for alarm. It may produce inconvenience and some inflammation; but nature, my dear sir, by the very same process which produces pain and irritation to the patient, often expels any extraneous substance, which, if it remained, might cause more serious results."

Mr. Slattery remained at least an hour and a half; and to say the truth, during that time he put our good friend Ned Hayward to some torture, but in the end, he succeeded in extracting from the wound which that gentleman had received, a portion of his waistcoat, which had been carried in by the ball in its passage. Some hemorrhage followed, which was stopped with difficulty; but at length the good surgeon took his leave, and descended with Beauchamp to the lower room.

Widow Lamb, however, met them at the foot of the stairs, saying, in a low tone—

"There is a servant on horseback, from the Park, sir, just now before the door. He has got a note, which he will give to no one but you; and I did not know what to do."

"There is no necessity for any further concealment," said Beauchamp, advancing to

the door ; “ you have got a note for me,” he continued, speaking to the servant, who touched his hat, and delivered a small billet.

Beauchamp tore it open, and read while good Mr. Slattery paused beside him, in the hope of hearing some news ; for, as we have shown, he was not without a laudable portion of curiosity.

“ I must go over directly,” said Beauchamp, for that note placed before his eyes a very unpleasant state of affairs at Tarningham Park—a mortgage foreclosed, an execution placed in the house, and Sir John Slingsby himself arrested on a heavy bond debt, for long arrears of interest, and interest upon interest, and lawyers’ costs. Isabella wrote in a tone of despair ; and yet there was something shining through all her gloomy words—a confidence in him to whom those words were written which was very pleasing to him.

“ Can I drive you over in my gig, Mr. Beauchamp ?” said Mr. Slattery.

“ No, I thank you,” replied the other ; “ I dare say, my good fellow, you will not object to let me mount your horse ?” he continued, addressing the servant. “ I must get over to the Park as speedily as possible.”

Under ordinary circumstances, perhaps, the man might have objected ; but the events which had just happened at his master's house, were, by the time he set out, known from the house-keeper's room to the pigsty, and had excited amongst the servants too strong a feeling of dismay and distress, for him to hesitate when there was a chance of affording aid, or even consolation, to Sir John Slingsby and his daughter. He instantly acceded, then, and lengthened the stirrups. Beauchamp only stayed to get his hat and speak a few words to Ned Hayward, then sprang into the saddle, and the next moment was going straight across the country towards Tarningham Park.

CHAPTER IV.

ALL was dismay and confusion in the house of Sir John Slingsby, when, after having galloped straight across the country, without heeding bridle-paths or carriage-roads, Beauchamp drew his rein at the door. No servant came to take the horse, for all were busy within, though, busy with what, would have been difficult to say. The only thing they had to be busy with was their own consternation; for there was no packing up for departure, no inventories, no arrangements in progress; and yet not an attendant appeared, except through the double glass doors, where a knot was to be seen assembled in the inner vestibule, who never turned a look towards the terrace before the house. One excuse, perhaps, might be that there were so many

people arriving, that a new-comer could attract no attention. It seemed as if a general call had been made upon Tarningham, to attend and witness the disgrace and discomfort of the family. A number of tradesmen were gathered before the doors conversing together in low tones, and with gloomy faces ; and there was a post-chaise, besides a gig, a saddle-horse, and tax-cart or two. Beauchamp thought the spectacle somewhat odd ; for it seemed to him, notwithstanding all he knew of the gossiping propensities of small places, that the news of Sir John Slingsby's misfortunes must have spread with marvellous rapidity. But he knew not Mr. Wharton, nor could conceive the policy which should induce a man, who had chosen his moment for consummating a long prepared scheme for stripping another of all his worldly wealth, to complicate his difficulties by every means, so as to render the bonds he had cast round him indissoluble.

" Here, take my horse," he said, addressing the sullen-looking postillion who stood behind the chaise ; and when the man obeyed, civilly enough, Beauchamp approached a hale-looking man, like a grazier, and inquired, " What is all this ?"

“ Why, sir,” replied the man, who had often seen his interrogator in Tarningham, “ Mr. Wharton’s clerk told me that there was an execution going to be put in, so I came up to see if I could get my bill. But the lawyer was beforehand with us ; and the matter is not so much—only forty pound or so—and I did not think it worth while, when I found how matters are going, to trouble the hearty old gentleman, who has spent a deal o’ money with us all in his day.”

“ You seem a very respectable man,” said Beauchamp, calmly, but still somewhat moved, “ and you shall not lose by your conduct. You, sir,” and he turned to another, “ I think you are the stationer at Tarningham—is yours the same errand, and on the same information ?”

“ Yes, sir,” answered the person he addressed, “ one of Mr. Wharton’s young men came down and told me ; but I think with my neighbour Groves, that we should behave handsome.”

“ I see the whole matter,” said Beauchamp, speaking rather to himself than those around. “ You can wait a little, gentlemen ? I think Sir John can pay you all without inconvenience,

though he is a careless man, and his affairs may not be quite in order."

"They say Mr. Wharton has arrested him, sir," said a little man, with a thin, small voice.

"I will go in and see," replied Beauchamp, with a smile. "If any of you could contrive to go or send down to Tarningham, and say to Mr. Bacon, the attorney, that Lord Lenham would be glad to see him here immediately, you would oblige me. Tell him to lose not a moment."

"I'll go in a jiffey," cried the stout man, jumping into a tax-cart. "Who did you say, my lord?"

"Lord Lenham," answered Beauchamp; "he will know who you mean;" and turning round, he walked into the house.

The servants grouped themselves differently at his appearance, and bowed low, the butler venturing to say,

"I am glad you have come, sir."

"Where is your master?" asked Beauchamp.

"In the library, sir," replied the man, "with a number of them. It is a sad time, sir, specially for my poor young lady."

The man walked on before, and opened the

library door; Beauchamp followed quickly; and certainly the sight which that room presented was a painful one. Mrs. Clifford sat near one of the windows, the picture of despair; Isabella was seated at the table, with her eyes buried in her hands, and the rich curls of her beautiful hair falling over her face. Mary was bending down to speak to her; grief in her lovely face, but yet as calm and composed as usual. Old Sir John was a little in advance, with two bailiffs standing near—not the same who had been there earlier in the morning—and his valet appeared behind him, helping him to put on his great coat, while Mr. Wharton stood at the other side of the large library-table, with a smile upon his lip, a frown upon his brow, a sparkling black eye, and a double degree of red in one of the cheeks, though the other looked somewhat pale. Two or three men, whose business there and ordinary functions were not apparent at the moment, made up the rest of the company.

Sir John Slingsby had one arm in the sleeve of his great coat, and was thrusting angrily and ineffectually at the garment, to get the other in also, speaking all the time in a furious tone, with his face turned to Mr. Wharton.

“ I tell you, Wharton, you are a d—d scoundrel,” he said — “ an ungentlemanlike blackguard. You have swindled me out of thousands, and you know it ; and now, without giving me a hint, you come upon me in this way.”

“ You are angry, Sir John—you are angry,” said Mr. Wharton, in a sweet tone. “ It is as unpleasant to me as to you, I can assure you ; but when I heard that Mr. Wittingham had issued process, I was compelled, however unwillingly, to take care of myself and my clients. You know I told you a month ago it could not go on any longer ; so you cannot say you had no notice.”

The old baronet was about to pour upon him a new volley of objurgations, thrusting manfully at the sleeve of his coat all the time, when suddenly his eye rested upon Beauchamp, and he stopped, turning a little pale, for the presence of that gentleman at such a moment both surprised and pained him. Mary whispered a word to her cousin, however, and Isabella, starting up with the tears in her eyes, and a glow upon her cheeks, held out her hand to him, exclaiming, “ Oh, thank you—thank you ! Dr. Miles was not to be found,”

she added, in a whisper, "or I would not have sent."

Beauchamp smiled and shook his head half reproachfully; and Sir John, recovering himself, took his hand, saying, "Ah, Beauchamp, you have come at an awkward time. Can't ask you to dinner to-day, my dear sir, for the house is in the hands of the myrmidons of the law, and I must away, they tell me. It is a bad job, I am afraid."

"Nevertheless I intend to dine with you here, Sir John," answered Beauchamp, laughing and shaking the Baronet's hand warmly, "so you had better take off your great coat."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Mr. Wharton, taking a step forward, "but I am afraid Sir John Slingsby cannot remain with you at present. Business has been too long delayed already by the folly of the officer who thought fit——"

"To act like a man of some consideration and feeling, I suppose, sir," said Beauchamp, eyeing the attorney from head to foot with a calm, cold, withering look. "You are Mr. Wharton the attorney, I imagine, of whom I have heard so much in regard to several transactions soon to be inquired into?"

“My name is Wharton, sir ; yes, my name is Wharton,” answered the solicitor, in a sharp, fierce tone, “and I insist that you do not interrupt the operation of the law.”

“The operation of the law I shall not interrupt,” replied Beauchamp, “but the operations of the lawyer I certainly shall.”

“He’s a nabob,” said Sir John Slingsby to his niece in a low, laughing voice ; “yes, you are quite right, Beauchamp ; this is Mr. Wharton, the attorney, calling himself esquire, and a greater scoundrel does not live between the four seas. He has cheated me through thick and thin, and now wants, by coming upon me all in a moment, to get possession of my property, as he has done with others before now.”

“If such are his intentions, he will find himself mistaken,” answered Beauchamp ; “but now, Sir John, take off your coat again, and we will to business. I think the ladies may as well leave us, however. Be satisfied, my dear madam,” he continued, speaking to Mrs. Clifford, who had risen and come a little forward ; “be satisfied, Miss Slingsby—all this matter will be easily arranged, and Sir John and I will join you in the drawing-room in an hour.”

While Beauchamp had been speaking these

few words, Mr. Wharton had been conversing with rapid utterance, but in a low voice, with one of the men present, who seemed to be the superior sheriff's officer, and as soon as the gentleman ceased, he exclaimed, "Well, sir, as you think the whole matter can be so easily arranged, I shall leave you to arrange it."

"Excuse me," Mr. Wharton, said Beauchamp, coolly, "you will be good enough to stay. We shall want you for certain receipts, and, perhaps," he added, with a smile, "for some good legal advice till my own solicitor comes, whom I expect in about half an hour."

"My receipts can be soon given," said Mr. Wharton, a good deal staggered and alarmed by Mr. Beauchamp's calm tone, and his allusion to his solicitor; "but I can tell you, that if you think that is all you will have to do, you are mistaken. The house is filled with creditors."

"Gathered together by Mr. Wharton, the attorney, for the purpose of overwhelming a gentleman whom he sought to ruin," answered Beauchamp. "I am aware of all that, sir. Your proceedings have been watched, and I am informed of almost every step you have

taken for the last month. I dare say, however, we shall find means of satisfying all who have any just claim."

Isabella had lingered at the door after her aunt and cousin had passed out, and now hastily turning back, she placed a little packet she had held tightly in her hand, in that of Beauchamp, saying, in a low voice, "Here is more than six thousand pounds, left from what kind, good, Ned Hayward gave last night. The other debts are not large, but this man's claim is frightful."

She spoke in a tone of alarm, but Beauchamp hastened to relieve her, replying, "Never fear, never fear! The claims must be investigated, but all that is just shall be paid. Leave us, and make your mind easy, dear Miss Slingsby."

"I really cannot waste my time here," said Mr. Wharton, as the young lady left the room; "I have important business to attend to, and the magistrates to meet at eleven, Mr. What's-your-name."

"My name, sir, is Henry Beauchamp St. Leger, Viscount Lenham," answered Beauchamp, "and I am afraid the magistrates must dispense with your company to-day, Mr. Wharton. You cannot carry this business

through, sir, in the same manner that you did that of my poor uncle, Mr. St. Leger Moreton. So now make up your mind at once, sir, to remain here till the whole of this unpleasant business which you have stirred up against Sir John Slingsby be brought to a conclusion, for depend upon it I will not let you go till such is the case."

Mr. Wharton's face had turned paler and paler, till the carbuncles, of which he did not possess a few, remained alone in their glory; but he was an irritable and fiery man up to a certain point, and he replied in a bold tone, "Oh ho, my lord! Do you think because you happen to be a peer who has been skulking about the country under an *alias*, that you can come down and brow-beat us country gentlemen at your pleasure?"

"I never attempt to brow-beat a *gentleman* at all," replied Beauchamp, laying a particular emphasis on the last word, which called up a very unpleasant grin upon the faces of two or three of the men present, "nor do I brow-beat you, Mr. Wharton; but I simply insist upon your staying till the business which brought you here is concluded. You have no right to put Sir John Slingsby in an unpleasant posi-

tion, and then leave him there when your presence is wanted to relieve him from it."

"He has a ducking in the horse-pond, too, to go through," cried Sir John Slingsby, "such as we gave the other bailiff he sent up this morning. He must wait—he must wait for all the honours," and turning round with a laugh, the worthy baronet whispered a word or two to his valet, who remained in the room.

"I will take care, Sir John," said the man, and moved towards the door; but Beauchamp interposed, saying—

"No, no, we must have no violence. Only order the servants not to let this man pass out till I have done with him. And now to business. Sir John, if you will take the end of the table, I will sit here. Mr. Wharton will place himself there, and the matter will soon be arranged. Ring that bell, sir."

The bailiff to whom he spoke obeyed in an instant; Sir John Slingsby took a chair at the head of the table, and Mr. Wharton, seeing no help for it, seated himself where Beauchamp pointed, turning his face to the window with an indifferent air, as if the business about to take place was no concern of his.

"Now, sir, what is it you want here?"

asked Beauchamp, addressing one of the officers.

"I hold a writ against Sir John Slingsby for twenty-two thousand three hundred pounds," said the man, "at the suit of Joseph Wharton, Esq."

"Well, sir, stand back," said Beauchamp; "we will deal with you presently. And you, sir?" he continued, speaking to another stout, broad-set, black-faced man.

This proved to be an officer put in execution upon a second bond for a sum of seven thousand pounds, at the suit of the same person. He also was directed to stand back, Beauchamp saying, "Upon these actions we will give bail, as they must be tried. You, sir, there at the end of the table, what do you want?"

"Why, please you, my lord, it's only my bill for a hundred and seventeen pounds, or thereabouts, for repairs to the stables and offices. If it had not been Mr. Wharton told me I should not get my money if I did not apply at once, I should never have thought of troubling Sir John."

Beauchamp's eye fixed sternly upon the attorney, who exclaimed, with a quivering lip,

"Did you not consult me, sir? Was I not bound to give you a just opinion?"

"I never said a word to nobody," replied the man, "till I met you in the street, and you told me Mr. Wittingham was going to arrest Sir John."

"Really, my lord, this is trifling," said Mr. Wharton. "I ask is Sir John Slingsby ready to discharge his heavy debt to me? If he is, let him do it, and I go. If not, he must, I fear, go to prison."

"He is quite ready, sir, to discharge every *just* debt this instant," replied Beauchamp, "but we doubt that yours is just, sir, and therefore we will deal first with those that are certainly honest. Sir John," he continued, pointing to a servant who had come in, "will you order Dr. Miles to be sent for. Now, my good man, you shall have a cheque for your money," and taking out his cheque-book, he wrote an order for the amount, taking the builder's name and statement from his own lips.

Another man was then called forward, and the same course pursued, Beauchamp proceeding quietly, although he saw Mr. Wharton rise, and enter into eager consultation with the bailiffs.

He was not allowed to go on long without interruption, for after what seemed some urgent remonstrances on the part of Mr. Wharton, and a good deal of resistance on the part of the sheriff's officer, the latter stepped forward, saying, "I really, my lord, cannot wait any longer, and I do not see any good of it; for Sir John being in my custody, and not knowing what detainers may be lodged against him, a bail bond cannot be drawn till we see."

The man spoke civilly, and with an evident respect for rank, and Beauchamp answered calmly, "Your observation is a very just one, my good friend. I have only to answer, however, that I am ready to give bail to any amount which you may think necessary to secure the sheriff, in which Dr. Miles will join me I am sure, as soon as he arrives."

"It is a heavy sum, sir," said the bailiff, doubtfully.

"True," answered Beauchamp, "and moreover you do not know, except from my own word, who I am, nor that I am in a position to give an available bond. It is for that very reason that I wish you to delay till my solicitor and Dr. Miles arrive, when I assure you, upon my word of honour, that you shall have every

satisfaction. The sum required would be more than met by money of mine in the Tarningham bank, as you will see by that receipt, if I thought fit to pay the whole debt claimed by Mr. Wharton at once, which I do not. The bond on which the writ has been taken out is, you tell me, for twenty-two thousand three hundred pounds. Here you see are sixty-five thousand pounds paid on my account into the Tarningham bank."

"But there is another bond for seven thousand five hundred pounds, on which execution has issued," said Mr. Wharton.

"Exactly so," said Beauchamp, whose thoughts were very rapid, "and the way I intend to deal with that matter is as follows: We will pay the amount of that bond under protest as a matter of account, reserving this other claim for twenty-three thousand pounds to try the questions that may arise, such as consideration, usury, &c."

Mr. Wharton bit his lip. He saw that he had made one mistake. He feared that he might have made more; for knowing that Sir John Slingsby had little acquaintance with law, and an invincible objection to lawyers, excepting when he wanted to borrow money, he

had gone on with somewhat rash confidence in his own powers of over-reaching. However, he put a bold face upon the matter, saying, "That won't do, sir—that won't do, my lord. You seem to have a smattering of the law, but you will find that all accounts have been examined and passed. No court in Christendom will open that question again."

"We will see," replied Beauchamp, quietly.

"Then there is the mortgage," said Mr. Wharton.

"That will be dealt with as we shall be advised," rejoined the young nobleman; "the matter of the mortgage has nothing to do with the business before us; and, moreover, Mr. Wharton, I will beg you not to interfere here till you are called upon. Though a lawyer, you are exactly in the same position as any other creditor, and in taking out this writ, you have given all power into other hands. If I satisfy the sheriff that he has sufficient security according to law, for the appearance of Sir John Slingsby, that is all that is necessary; and I will tell you, sir, that sooner than see a course, which is certainly unhandsome, and which I suspect to be villanous, successful against my friend, even so far as to remove him

from his own house for an hour, I would pay the amount of all claims upon him to the sheriff under protest. I have the means of doing so at command this moment, and therefore be very sure that your arts will avail you nothing.—Sir, I understand you,” he added, sternly, “the property upon which you have advanced a pitiful sum of fifty thousand pounds, and by accumulating interest upon interest, and costs upon costs, have raised the debt to nearly eighty thousand, is worth, at least, two hundred. The bait was tempting, sir; but beware that, in snapping at it too eagerly, you have not got the hook in your jaws. There is such a thing, sir, as striking fraudulent attorneys off the roll, and, at all events be sure, that however pleasant it might be to possess this estate, you will never have it.”

“I do not want it, sir,” cried Mr. Wharton, half mad with rage and vexation; “I would not have it if you would give it to me.”

Beauchamp laughed, and Sir John Slingsby shouted; while all the other persons in the room, not excepting bailiffs, tittered, without disguise, to the lawyer’s sad discomfort.

“Ah! here comes Miles,” exclaimed Sir John, “and Mr. Under-sheriff too, by Jove!

That is lucky ; the matter will soon be settled now.—How are you, doctor, how are you, Mr. Sheriff? you are the very man we wanted.”

“I am very sorry for all this business, Sir John,” said a tall gentlemanlike person, whom he had addressed; “but having business at Tarningham, and hearing of the unfortunate occurrence by the way, I thought it better to come up myself, as I felt sure the action could be bailed.”

“And so it can,” cried Sir John Slingsby ; “here stands bail ready in the person of my friend, Lord Lenham ; but that pitiful little snivelling rogue, Wharton, objects.”

“Ah ! good day, Wharton,” said the sheriff, drily ; “why do you object?”

“No, I do not object,” replied the attorney ; “the men here, Bulstrode and the rest, thought there might be detainers, and the process having——”

“No, no !” cried the officer, “we thought nothing about it, till you told us to refuse the bail till we had searched the office. I’ve a shrewd guess, Mr. Wharton, that you have got up all the creditors here who could lodge detainers, and his lordship offers to pay all honest debts at once, and to put in bail against yours.”

“Honest debts ! what do you mean by that ?” exclaimed Wharton, furiously ; but the sheriff interfered, and at the same time Doctor Miles and Beauchamp, who had been speaking together, turned round, and the clergyman introduced his young friend to the officer of the county by the title of Viscount Lenham.

“This matter, I think, can be settled with you, sir, in a few words,” said Beauchamp. “I do not choose to see my friend, Sir John Slingsby, wronged. It so happens, that intending to buy an estate in this neighbourhood, I have had a considerable sum paid lately into the Tarningham bank. I am ready to give bail bond to any amount you may think necessary to your own security, that Sir John appears to the action of Mr. Wharton, or any one else ; or to pay into your hands any sum claimed, under protest. I think, in these circumstances, there can be no need of removing Sir John from his own house.”

“Not in the least,” said the sheriff ; “bail will be quite sufficient, and can be given here quite as well as ten miles hence.”

“But, my dear sir,” exclaimed Mr. Wharton, “there may be detainers for aught you know, and to a large amount.”

“I will take my chance of that, Wharton,” replied the under-sheriff; “there were none when I came away; for I had occasion to examine the books. It is not usual to lodge detainers till caption has been actually effected, I think, my good friend.”

“Your proceeding is very rash and irregular, sir,” replied the lawyer, nettled, “and I should certainly object, if——”

“Pooh, pooh!” cried the sheriff, “I am the best judge of my own affairs; and you are meddling with what does not concern you, Mr. Wharton. If I take sufficient bail for Sir John’s appearance to your action, that is all you have to do with, and perhaps more; so let us have no more of this; for I will not be meddled with in the discharge of my duties. You tried this once before, sir, and did not find it succeed.”

“Well, sir, take your own way—take your own way!” cried Mr. Wharton, in a sharp tone; “the sum is large; if the bail be not good, you are responsible. A gentleman who goes about the country under one false name, may very well take another. I do not mean to say that it is so; but this gentleman who calls himself Lord Lenham now, and called himself Mr. Beauchamp a few days ago, may be the

greatest swindler in England for aught any of us know."

"Swindlers do not usually have large sums at the banker's," said Dr. Miles, drily; "that is to say, Mr. Wharton, not those swindlers whom the law is willing to take hold of, though I have known many rich men who swindled a good deal within the law, especially in your profession. But to set all that at rest, I will join in the bond, if necessary, and I possess means, I trust, sufficient to ensure Mr. Under-sheriff against all risk.—There comes Bacon, trotting up on his little fat horse. Bacon is a very excellent man, considering the temptations of profession and example."

"Well, as my opinion is of no value, my presence can be of no use," said Mr. Wharton; "and I shall therefore go. Good morning, gentlemen—Sir John Slingsby, good morning."

The baronet took a step forward, looking at the lawyer somewhat ominously, while the good stout calf of his leg might be seen to tremble a little, as if agitated by the simultaneous action of antagonist muscles—but then he stopped, saying aloud—

"No, I won't kick him—no, I won't kick anybody any more."

“A very prudent resolution, Sir John,” said Dr. Miles; “pray adhere to it; and if you include the horsewhip in your renunciations, you will do well.”

Mr. Wharton was suffered to retreat, un-kicked; the matter of the bail-bond was easily arranged; all the rest of the business passed quietly; the bailiffs and their satellites were withdrawn from the house; the creditors who remained, paid; and the under-sheriff took his leave. Somewhat more time had been expended, indeed, than Beauchamp had expected that the affair would occupy, ere he, Sir John Slingsby, and Doctor Miles, were once more left alone in the library; but then the baronet seized his friend's hand, with an unwonted dew in his eyes, saying—

“How can I ever thank you for your noble conduct. I cannot show my gratitude—but you must be secured. You shall have a mortgage for the whole sum: the estate can well bear it, I am sure, notwithstanding all that fellow Wharton says.”

“I am quite convinced it can, Sir John,” answered Beauchamp, “and I will accept your offer, because, for reasons of my own, I am exceedingly anxious that you should be under

no possible obligation to me ; and now let us join the ladies ; for they will think we are never coming."

Dr. Miles smiled ; for though he had never played at the games of love and matrimony, he had been a looker-on all his life, and understood them well. Sir John Slingsby was totally unconscious, and led the way to the drawing-room, marvelling a little, perhaps — for he was not a vain man—at the fact of his having so completely won Beauchamp's regard, and created such an interest in his bosom, but never attributing to his daughter any share therein. With parents it is ever the story of the philosopher and his cat ; and though they can solve very difficult problems regarding things at a distance, yet they do not always readily see that a kitten can go through the same hole in a door which its mother went through before it.

"Here, Isabel," cried the old gentleman, as they entered the room where the three ladies were seated, watching the door as if their fate hung upon its hinges, "shake this gentleman by the hand, as the best friend your father ever had."

"I do thank him, from my heart," said

Isabella, giving Beauchamp her hand, with tears in her eyes; "but yet, my dear father," she added frankly, "Mr. Beauchamp would think me ungenerous, if I did not tell you that you have another friend, who has acted in as kind and noble a manner as himself. I mean Captain—no, I will call him by his old name, Ned Hayward; for to him we owed the means of discharging the debt to that man Wittingham."

"The obligation is infinitely greater to him than to me, my dear Miss Slingsby," said Beauchamp; "for I know that Hayward's income is not very large, while, in my case there is really no obligation at all. This money was lying idle, and it might just as well be invested in one way as another."

"But every one is not so ready to invest money in a friend's relief," said Sir John, "and I shall never forget it. Hang me, my dear girl, if I can tell what he found out in me to like or respect! I never could discover anything of the kind myself."

Isabella coloured to the eyes, but answered at once—

"Mr. Beauchamp consulted only his own noble heart."

“Mr. Beauchamp!” cried Sir John Slingsby, with one of his merry laughs; “Mr. Beauchamp has nothing to do with it, Bella. I am not in the least indebted to Mr. Beauchamp.”

Isabella, Mrs. Clifford, and Mary, were all alarmed; for they might well fear that the events of that morning had somewhat affected Sir John Slingsby’s brain. But he soon relieved them.

“No, Isabella,” he continued, “it is to this gentleman I am indebted—let me introduce him to you. Isabella—Lord Lenham! Lord Lenham—my daughter.”

Isabella cast her eyes to the ground; and a shade of deep, and, it seemed to Beauchamp, anxious thought, came over her face; but the next moment she looked up, all bright and sparkling again, and exclaimed—

“So, Lord Lenham has thought fit to come upon us in masquerade! That was hardly fair, my lord.”

“Some day, when Miss Slingsby will let me tell a long story, she shall hear the reasons why,” answered Beauchamp, “and may then judge whether it was fair or not. If she decides the cause in my favour, she may tell the pleadings to the whole party; if she thinks I have greatly erred, she shall forgive the offender,

and conceal his crime under the seal of confession."

Again Isabella blushed deeply; and Sir John Slingsby made the matter worse, by exclaiming, "Ho, ho! it is to be a private conference, is it? We are all to be kept in the dark, as indeed I have been lately; for all I know is, that I have been placed in a very unpleasant and unexpected situation this morning, and as suddenly relieved from it by the affection of two dear girls, and the generosity of our noble friend. I have not thanked you yet, my dear Mary; but pray let me hear how all this has been brought about, that I may do so discreetly."

"In the meantime," said Beauchamp, "I, who know the whole, will walk back again to my poor friend, Hayward, and tell him how all things have gone."

"You promised to dine—you promised to dine," cried Sir John Slingsby; "no breach of promise, or I will have my action against you."

"I will keep mine to the letter," replied Beauchamp, "and be back in a couple of hours."

"And bring Ned Hayward with you," said the baronet.

Beauchamp explained that such a thing was impossible, saying that his friend had become somewhat worse in health since the preceding night, but without giving any cause for alarm. His eyes turned towards Mary Clifford as he spoke, with a momentary glance which sufficed, by the paleness that spread over her face, to confirm suspicions which he had entertained since the night before. He was too much a gentleman in heart to keep his eyes there more than that one moment, for he felt that it would not only be a rudeness, but an unkindness.

"I will walk with you, my good lord," said Doctor Miles. "I long to see Captain Hayward. He has particularly interested me."

"And you will walk back with Lord Lenham to dinner, doctor?" said Sir John, as gaily as ever. "We will have one jolly evening after all this *fracas*, at all events."

"I will come to dinner," replied Dr. Miles, "expressly to keep it from being too jolly, you incorrigible old gentleman."

But Sir John only laughed, and the peer and the priest walked away together.

CHAPTER V.

"You said, just now, doctor," observed Beauchamp, as they strolled through the park, "that Ned Hayward particularly interested you. I am glad of it, for he did so with me from the first, without my well knowing why; and we are always glad to find a prepossession which savours perhaps a little of weakness, kept in countenance by others for whom we have a respect."

"You mistake altogether, young gentleman," replied the doctor, with the dry spirit upon him. "In my case it is no prepossession; neither did he interest me from the first. I generally can give a reason for what I feel. I am no being of impulses. Indeed," he continued, more discursively, "I was anything but pre-

possessed in Captain Hayward's favour. I knew he had been brought up in the army, under the judicious auspices of Sir John Slingsby. That dear girl, Isabella, told me that, from what she could remember of him, he was a gay, lively, rattling fellow. Sir John called him the best fellow that ever lived, and I know tolerably well what that means. The reason, then, why he interested me very soon, was because he disappointed me. For half an hour after I first saw him, I thought he was just what I expected—a man constitutionally lively, gay from want of thought, good-humoured from want of feeling; having some talents, but no judgment; acting right occasionally by impulse, but not by principle."

"You did him great injustice," said Beauchamp, warmly.

"I know I did," replied the clergyman, "but not long. A thousand little traits showed me that, under the shining and rippling surface of the lake, there were deep, still waters. The singular delicacy and judgment with which he treated that business of the scandalous attack upon Mrs. Clifford's carriage; the kindly skill with which he led Sir John away from the subject, when he found that it distressed poor

Mary; his conduct towards the poacher and his boy; his moderation and his gentleness in some cases, and his vigour and his resolution in others, soon set all preconceived opinions to rights. He has one fault, however, which is both a very great and a very common one—he conceals his good qualities from the eyes of others. This is a great wrong to society. If all good and honest men would but show themselves as they really are, they would stare vice out of countenance; and if even those who are not altogether what we wish, would show the good that is in them, and conceal the bad, they would put vice and folly out of fashion; for I do believe that there are far more good men, and even a greater amount of good qualities amongst those who are partly bad, than the world knows anything about. So you see I am not a misanthrope.”

“I never suspected you of being so, my dear doctor,” said Beauchamp; “if I had, I should not have attempted to create an interest in you for myself.”

“Ay, then, you had an interested motive in coming up every other day to my little rectory, just at the time that Isabella Slingsby visited her poor and her schools !” cried Dr. Miles, laugh-

ing ; “ but I understand it—I understand it all, my noble lord—there is not such a thing as a purely disinterested man on earth : the difference is simply the sort of interest men seek to serve—some are filthy interests, such as avarice, ambition, ostentation, even gluttony—how I have seen men fawn upon the givers of good dinners ! Then there are maudlin interests, such as love and its *et ceteras* ; and then, again, there are the generous interests ; but I am afraid I must class those you sought to serve in such friendly visitations, amongst the maudlin ones—is it not so ? ”

“ Not exactly,” answered Beauchamp ; “ for if you remember, my good friend, you will find that I came up to your house at the same hour, and as often, before I saw Miss Slingsby there, as afterwards. Moreover, during the whole time I did so come, before I was introduced to her father, I never had a thought of offering her my hand, how much soever I might admire and esteem her.”

Dr. Miles turned round, and looked at his companion, steadily, for a moment or two.

“ I do not know what to make of you,” he said, at length.

“ I will tell you,” replied Beauchamp, with

a sad smile, "for I do not believe any one could divine the causes which have led me to act a somewhat unusual, if not eccentric, part, without knowing events which took place many years ago. I told you once that I wished to make you my father confessor. I had not time then to finish all I had to say; but my intention has been still the same, and it is now necessary, for Miss Slingsby's sake, that I should execute it: we shall have time in going over, and I will make my story short. You are probably aware that I was an only son, my father having never married after my mother's death, my mother having survived my birth only a few hours. My father was a man of very keen sensibilities, proud of his name, his station, and his family—proud of their having been all honourable, and not one spot of reproach having ever rested on his lineage. He was too partially fond of me, too, as the only pledge of love left him by one for whom he sorrowed with a grief that unnerved his mind, and impaired his corporeal health. I was brought up at home, under a careful tutor, for my father had great objections, partly just, partly I believe unjust, towards schools. At home, I was a good deal spoiled, and had too

frequently my own way, till I was sent to college, where I first learned something of the world, but, alas! not much, and I have had harder lessons since. The first of these was the most severe. My cousin, Captain Moreton, was ten years older than myself; but he had not yet shown his character fully. My father and myself knew nothing of it; for though he paid us an annual visit for a week or two, the greater part of his time was spent either here or in Scotland, where he had a grand-aunt who doted upon him. One year, when I was just twenty, while he was on a shooting-party at our house in October, he asked me to go down with him in the following summer, to shoot grouse at old Miss Moreton's. I acceded readily; and my father as willingly gave his consent. We set out on the twenty-fifth of July, and I was received with all sorts of Scotch hospitality at Miss Moreton's house. There were many persons there at dinner, and amongst the rest a Miss Charlotte Hay——"

"Why do you stop?" asked Dr. Miles.

"A Miss Charlotte Hay," continued Beauchamp, with an evident effort, "a very beautiful person, and highly accomplished. She was some three or four years older than myself, I

believe, affecting a romantic style of thought, feeling, and language. She was beautiful, I have said; but hers was not the style of beauty I admired; and at first I took but little notice of her. She sang well, however; and before the first evening was over we had talked a good deal—the more, perhaps, as I found that most of the ladies present, though of no very high station, nor particularly refined manners, did not seem to love her conversation. It appeared to me that she was superior to them; and when I found that, though of good family, her fortune was extremely limited, and that she had resided with old Miss Moreton for some time, as something between a friend and a companion, I fancied I understood the coldness I observed on the part of more wealthy people. Many days passed over, during which she certainly endeavoured to attract and captivate me. I was in general somewhat on my guard; but I was then young, inexperienced, vain, romantic; and though I never dreamed of making her my wife, yet I trifled away many an hour by her side, feeling passion growing upon me—mark, I say passion, not love; for there was much that prevented me from respecting her enough to love her—a display of her person, a

carelessness of proprieties, an occasional gleam of perverted principle, that no art could hide. Once or twice, too, I caught a smile passing between her and my cousin Moreton, which I did not like; and whenever that occurred it recalled me to myself; but, with weak facility, I fell back again till the day of my departure approached. Two or three days before—on the eleventh of August, which was my twenty-first birth-day—Miss Moreton declared she would have a party of her neighbours to celebrate the event. None of the higher and more respectable gentry were invited, or, if they were, they did not come. There were a good many deep-drinking lairds, and some of their wives and daughters, somewhat stiff in their graver, and hoydenish in their merrier, moments. It is one of those days that the heart longs for years to blot out for ever. I gave way to the high spirits which were then habitual to me. I drank deep—deeper than I had ever before done. I suffered my brain to be troubled—I know not that there were not unfair means used to effect it, but, at all events, I was not myself. I recollect personally little that passed; but I have since heard that I was called upon to choose a wife for the afternoon. I was told it was the

custom of the country, on such occasions, so to do in sport; and that I fixed, at once upon this artful girl. In the presence of many witnesses I called her wife, and she called me husband. The evening passed over; I drank more wine at supper, and the next morning I found myself married—for the infamous fraud they called a marriage. In horror and dismay I burst away from the wretched woman who had lent herself to such a base transaction. I sent off my servant at once for horses to my carriage; I cast Moreton from me, who attempted to stop and reason with me, as he called it, representing that what had taken place was a full and sufficient marriage, according to the code of Scotland, for that public consent was all that was required by their law.”

“Or by the law of God either,” replied Dr. Miles, “but it must be free and intelligent consent.”

“I travelled night and day,” continued Beauchamp, rapidly, “till I had reached my father’s house and thrown myself at his feet. I told him all—I extenuated, concealed nothing; and I shall never forget either his kindness or his distress of mind. Instant steps were taken to ascertain the exact position in which I stood;

and the result was fatal to my hopes of happiness and peace ; for not only did he find that I was entangled past recal, but that the character of the woman herself was such as might be expected from her having been a party to so disgraceful a scheme. She had been blighted by scandal before she took up her residence in the house where I found her. Miss Moreton in her dotage yielded herself blindly to my cousin's guidance ; and there was more than a suspicion that he had made his aunt's protection a veil to screen his own paramour."

"What did you do? what did you do?" asked Dr. Miles, with more eagerness than he usually displayed ; "it was a hard case indeed."

"I went abroad immediately," replied Beauchamp, "for my father exacted from me a solemn promise never to live with or to see, if it could be avoided, the woman who had thus become my wife. He used strong and bitter, but just, terms in speaking of her. 'He could not survive the thought,' he said, 'that the children of a prostitute should succeed to the title of a family without a stain.' My promise was given willingly, for I will confess that hate and indignation and disgust rendered her very idea

odious to me. My father remained in England for some months, promising to make such arrangements regarding money—the base object of the whole conspiracy—that I should never be troubled any more. He added, tenderly and sadly, though gravely and firmly, that farther he could do nothing ; for that I must bear the consequences of one great error in a solitary and companionless life. In consideration of a promise on the woman's part never to molest me, nor to take my name, he settled upon her the sum of a thousand pounds per annum. During my father's life I heard no more of her ; but when he himself joined me in Italy, I could see but too plainly how grief and bitter disappointment had undermined a constitution already shaken. He did not long survive, and all that I have myself undergone has been little compared with the thought that the consequences of my folly served to shorten the days of my kind, good parent."

"But what became of the woman?" demanded Dr. Miles ; "you surely have had tidings of her since?"

"Within a month after my father's death," replied Beauchamp, "I received from her one of the most artful letters that woman ever wrote,

claiming to be received as my wife. But I will not trouble you with the details. Threats succeeded to blandishments, and I treated these with contempt, as I had the others with coldness. Then commenced a new system of persecution; she followed me, attempted to fix herself upon me. Once she arrived at an inn in the Tyrol as I was getting into my carriage, and declared before the people round that she was my abandoned wife. I answered not a word, but ordered the door to be closed and the postillions to drive on. Then came applications for an increased annuity, but I would not yield one step, knowing that it would but lead to others; and in the end, to free myself from every-day annoyance, I took the name of Beauchamp, hurried on to the East, directed my agent to conceal my address from every one, and for several years wandered far and wide. At length the tidings reach me that the annuity, which had at first been punctually demanded, had not been applied for; a report, too, reached my lawyer's ears that she had died in Paris. Still I would not return to claim my rank, lest there should be some deep scheme at work; and I continued in India and Syria for two years longer. The annuity remained unclaimed.

I knew that she had expensive habits and no means ; and I ventured back. I passed a few months in London without resuming my own name ; but the noise and bustle of the great city wearied me, and I came hither. Inquiries in the meantime had been made, somewhat languidly, perhaps, to ascertain the fate of this unhappy woman ; but here I saw Isabella Slingsby, and those inquiries have been since pursued rapidly and strictly. Every answer tended to one result ; and yesterday morning I received a letter from my solicitor, informing me that there can be no doubt of her demise. I will show it to you hereafter ; but therein he says that her effects in Paris had been publicly sold, as those of a person deceased, to pay the claims of her maid, who had brought forward sufficient proofs to satisfy the police that her mistress had died in Italy. The girl herself could not be found by my agents ; but the lawyers consider this fact, coupled with the total cessation of claims for the annuity, as proving the death of Charlotte Hay, and removing all doubt that this bitter bond is cancelled for ever."

"That is clear—that is clear," said Dr. Miles, who at this moment was pausing with his com-

panion at a stile ; “ and now, I suppose, it is hand and heart for Isabella Slingsby ? ”

“ Assuredly,” said Beauchamp ; “ but she must be informed of all this, and it is not a tale for me to tell.”

“ Will you have the kindness, sir,” said a voice from the other side of the hedge, as Beauchamp put his foot upon the first step of the stile, “ to keep on that side, and go out by the gate at the corner ? ”

“ Oh, is that you in the ditch, Stephen ? ” said Beauchamp ; “ very well, my good man, one way is as good as the other.”

“ I am watching something here, sir,” said the gamekeeper, in a low voice, “ and if you come over you’ll disturb the thing.”

Beauchamp nodded, and went on in the way directed ; and Dr. Miles, who had been meditating, replied to what he had said just before the interruption of the gamekeeper.

“ But who else can do it ? Sir John is unfit. Me, you would have ? Humph ! It is not a pleasant story for even an old gentleman to tell to a young lady.”

“ Yet she must know it,” answered Beauchamp ; “ I will, I can have no concealment from her.”

“Assuredly there you are right,” replied Dr. Miles ; “and I am sure the dear girl will value your sincerity properly.”

“She can but say that I committed a great error,” answered Beauchamp, “and for that error I have been punished by long years of bitterness.”

“Well, well, I will do my best,” answered the rector ; “but make your proposal first, and refer her to me for the story of your life. I will deal in generals—I will not go into details. That you can do hereafter, if you like.”

Thus conversing they walked on, and soon after reached the cottage of Stephen Gimlet, where they found Ned Hayward beginning to feel relief from the operation which the surgeon had performed in the morning. Beauchamp returned to him the sum which he had received from Miss Slingsby in the morning, saying, that he had found no necessity for using it, and Dr. Miles sat down by him, and talked with cheerful kindness for about a quarter of an hour. Was it tact, and a clear perception of people’s hearts, that led the worthy clergyman to select Mary Clifford for one of the subjects of his discourse, and to enlarge upon her high qualities ? At all events he succeeded in rais-

ing Captain Hayward's spirits ere he set out again upon his way homeward.

When he descended, he found Gimlet, the gamekeeper, seated with Widow Lamb; and the man, as he opened the door, apologized for having stopped the rector and Mr. Beauchamp at the stile, but did not state in what he had been so busily engaged. As soon, however, as Dr. Miles was gone, Stephen Gimlet resumed his conversation with Mrs. Lamb, and it was a low-toned and eager one. From time to time the old lady bowed her head, saying, "Yes;" but she added nothing to the monosyllable for some time. At length, however, in answer to something that her son-in-law said, she exclaimed—

"No, Stephen, do not speak with him about it; I tried it this morning, and it had a terrible effect upon him. It seemed to change him altogether, and made him, so kind and gentle as he is, quite fierce and sharp. Speak with his friend, Captain Hayward; for neither you nor I can know what all this may mean. But above all, watch well, for it is clear they are about no good; and tell me always what you hear and see, for I cannot help thinking that I know more of these matters than the young lord does

himself. A bitter bond did he call it? Well, it may be a bond for the annuity you heard him talk of; but, then, why does she not claim it? There must be some object, Stephen."

The good old lady's consideration of the subject was prevented at that moment from proceeding further, by the entrance of her son, Billy Lamb, who came up and kissed her affectionately. The lad was somewhat pale, and there was an air of fatigue in his small, pinched, but intelligent countenance, which made his mother hold him to her heart with a feeling of painful anxiety. Oh, how the affections of a parent twine themselves round a suffering child! Every care, every labour, every painful apprehension that he causes us seems but a new bond to bind our love the more strongly to him. The attachment that is dewed with tears, and hardened with the cold air of sorrow and fear, is ever the more hardy plant.

"Sit down, Bill," said Stephen Gimlet, kindly, "you look tired, my lad. I will get you a draught of beer."

"I cannot wait, Ste," answered the pot-boy, "for I must be back as quick as I can; but I can look in to see mother for a minute every day now. The gentleman who has got the little

lone cottage on the edge of Chandleigh Heath, gives me half-a-crown a week to bring up his letters and newspapers, and I take the time when all the folks are at dinner in our house."

"And get no dinner yourself, poor Bill," said Stephen Gimlet; "cut him a slice of the cold bacon, mother, and a hunch of bread. He can eat it as he goes. I'll run and draw him a draught of beer. It wont keep you a minute, Bill, and help you on, too."

He waited for no reply, but ran with a jug in his hand to the outhouse where his beer-barrel stood. When he came back, the boy drank eagerly, kissed the old lady again, and then set out with the bread and bacon in his hand; but Stephen Gimlet walked out with him, and after they had taken a few steps, he asked—

"Who is it, Bill, has got the cottage?"

"I don't know," answered the lad. "A tall, strong man he is, with large whiskers all the way under his chin, a little greyish. He met me last night, when I took up a parcel from Mr. Groomber to Buxton's inn, and asked if I came that way every day. I said I did not, but could come if he wanted anything."

"But you must know his name if you get his letters, Bill?" said Gimlet.

“No, I do not, but I soon can,” answered the deformed youth. “He took me into the cottage, and made the lady give him some paper and a pen and ink, and wrote a note to the postmaster, and gave me a half-crown, and said I should have the same every week. The postmaster wrapped up the letters and things in a bit of paper, and I did not think to look at it, but I can soon find out, if you want to know.”

“No,” answered Stephen Gimlet, drily; “I know already. Well, Bill, good bye; I must go about my work.” And so they parted.

CHAPTER VI.

I BEG Captain Moreton's pardon—I left him running across a field in not the brightest possible night that ever shone. I should, at least, have taken him safely home before now, wherever that home might be, which would be, indeed, difficult to say; for the home of Captain Moreton was what people who pore over long lines of figures call a *variable quantity*. However, no hare, in its morning's run, ever took more turnings and windings than did Captain Moreton on the night after his escape from his prison in the vestry. Every step of the country round he knew well, and up one narrow lane, through this small field, along that wood path, by another short cut, he went, sometimes walk-

ing and sometimes running, till at length he came to a common of no very great extent, lying half-way, or nearly so, between the town of Tarningham and the house called Buxton's Inn. The common was called Chandleigh Heath; and on the side next to the inn was the village of Chandleigh, while between the heath and Tarningham lay about two miles of well-cultivated but not very populous fields and meadows. At an angle of the common, on the side farthest from the high-road, a retired hosier of Chandleigh had built himself a cottage—a cottage suited to himself and his state—consisting of six rooms, all of minute size, and he had, moreover, planted himself a garden, in which roses strove with apple-trees and cherries. The hosier—as retired hosiers will very often do—died one day, and left the cottage to his nephew, a minor. The guardians strove to let the cottage furnished, but for upwards of a year they strove in vain; its extremely retired situation was against it, till one day it was suddenly tenanted, and right glad were they to get a guinea a week, and ask no questions. It was to this retired cottage, then, of the retired hosier, that Captain Moreton's steps were ultimately bent, and as it had win-

dows down to the ground on the garden side, he chose that side, and went in at the window, where, I forgot to remark, there were lights shining.

At a table in the room, with her foot upon a footstool, and a pillow behind her back, sat a lady whom we have before described ; and certainly, to look at her face, handsome as it was, no one would have fancied there was a fierce and fiery spirit beneath, so weak and, I may venture to call it, lack-a-daisical was the expression.

“Heaven, Moreton, how you startled me!” cried the lady. “Where have you been such a long time? You know I want society at night. It is only at night I am half alive.”

“Well,” said Captain Moreton, with a laugh, “I have been half dead and half buried ; for I have been down into a vault and shut up in a vestry as a close prisoner. I only got out by wrenching off the bars. Nobody could see my face, however, so that was lucky ; for they can but say I was looking for a register by candle-light, and the old sexton will not ’peach for his own sake.”

“Still at those rash tricks, Moreton,” said the lady ; “it will end in your getting hanged,

depend upon it. I have been writing a poem called 'The Rash Man,' and I was just hanging him when you came in and startled me."

"My rash tricks, as you call them, got you a thousand a year once," answered Moreton, sharply; "so, in pity, leave your stupid poetry, Charlotte, and listen to what I have to say."

"Stupid poetry!" exclaimed the lady, angrily. "There was a time when you did not call it so; and as for the thousand a year, it was more to serve yourself than to serve me that you fancied that scheme. You know that I hated the pedantic boy, as virtuous as a young kid, and as pious as his grandmother's prayer-book! Nothing would have induced me to marry him, if you had not represented——"

"Well, never mind all that," answered Captain Moreton, interrupting her. "We have something else to think of now, Charlotte. I don't know that it would not be better for me to be off, after all."

"Well, I am ready to go whenever you like," replied the lady. "I am sure it is not very pleasant to stay in this place, seeing nobody and hearing nothing; without opera, or concert, or coffee-house, or anything. I shall be very glad to go."

“Ay, ay, but that is a different matter,” said Captain Moreton, considerately. “I said it would be perhaps better for me to be off; but I am quite sure it would be better for you to stay.”

The lady looked at him for a moment or two with the eyes of a tiger. If she had had a striped or spotted skin upon her back, one would have expected her to spring at his throat the next minute; but she had acquired a habit of commanding her passions to a certain point, beyond which they indeed became totally ungovernable, but which was not yet attained; and she contented herself with giving Captain Moreton one of those *coups de patte* with which she sometimes treated him. “So, Moreton,” she said, “you think that you can go away and leave me to take care of myself, as you did some time ago; but you are mistaken, my good friend. I have become wiser now, and I certainly shall not suffer you.”

“How will you stop me?” asked her companion, turning sharply upon her.

“As to stopping you,” she replied, with a sneer, “I do not know that I can. You are a strong man and I am a weak woman, and in a tussle you would get the better; but I could

bring you back, Moreton, you know, if I did not stop you."

"How?" demanded he again, looking fiercely at her.

"By a magistrate's warrant, and half a dozen constables," answered the lady. "You do not think I have had so much experience of your amiable ways for nothing, or that I have not taken care to have proofs of a good many little things that would make you very secure in any country but America—that dear land of liberty, where fraud and felony find refuge and protection."

"Do you mean to say that you would destroy me, woman?" exclaimed Captain Moreton.

"Not exactly destroy you," replied his fair companion, "though you would make a fine criminal under the beam. I have not seen an execution for I do not know how long, and it is a fine sight, after all—better than all the tragedies that ever were written. It's no fun seeing men kill each other in jest—one knows that they come to life again as soon as the curtain falls; but once hanging over the drop, or lying on the guillotine, there's no coming to life any more. I should like to see you hanged,

Moreton, when you are hanged. You would hang very well, I dare say."

She spoke in the quietest, most sugary tone possible, with a slight smile upon her lip, and amused herself while she did so in sketching with the pen and ink a man under a beam, with a noose round his neck. Captain Moreton gazed at her meanwhile with his teeth hard shut, and not the most placable countenance in the world, as she brought vividly up before his imagination all those things which crime is too much accustomed and too willing to forget.

"And you, Charlotte, you would do this!" he exclaimed, at length; "but it is all nonsense; and how ever you can talk of such things I cannot imagine, when I merely spoke of going myself and leaving you for a short time, for your own good."

"For my own good! Oh, yes; I have heard all that before, more than twelve years ago," replied the lady. "I yielded to your notions of my own good then, and much good has come of it, to me, at least. So do not talk of ever separating your fate from mine again, Moreton; for were you to attempt it, I would do as I have said, depend upon it."

"It was your own good I thought about,"

replied Captain Moreton, bitterly, "and that you will soon see when you hear the whole. Do you not think if Lenham were to find out that you are living here with me, there would soon be suits in the ecclesiastical courts for divorce and all the rest?"

"Oh, you know, we talked about all that before," replied the lady, "and took our precautions. You are here as my earliest friend, assisting me to regain my rights, nothing more. All that was settled long ago, and I see no reason for beginning it all over again."

"But there is a reason," answered Captain Moreton, "as you would have heard before now, if you would have let me speak; but you are so diabolically hasty and violent. I brought you the best news you could have, if you would but listen."

"Indeed!" said the lady, looking up from the pleasant sketch she was finishing, with an expression of greater interest, "what may that be?"

"Why, simply, that Lenham has proposed to Miss Slingsby," replied Captain Moreton, "and they are to be married directly—as soon as that fellow, Wittingham, is out of all danger."

Her eyes flashed at the intelligence, and her lip curled with a triumphant smile, as she inquired, "Where did you hear it? Who told you? Are you sure?"

"Quite," answered Moreton. "I had it from old Slattery, the apothecary, who knows the secrets of all the houses round. He told it to me as a thing quite certain."

"Then I have him! Then I have him!" exclaimed his companion, joyfully. "Oh, I will make him drink the very dregs of a bitterer cup than ever he has held to my lips."

"But you must be very careful," said Captain Moreton—"not the slightest indiscretion—not the slightest hint, remember, or all is lost."

"I will be careful," she replied, "but yet all cannot be lost, even if he were to discover that I am alive. He has made a proposal to one woman, when he is already married to another. That would be disgrace enough to blast and wither him like a leaf in the winter. I know him well enough for that. For the first time he has given me the power of torturing him, and I will work that engine till his cold heart cracks, let him do what he will."

"Well, this was the reason I thought it

would be better for me to be off for a short time," said Captain Moreton, "though you must remain here."

"I don't see that," cried the lady; "I won't have it."

Her companion had fallen into a fit of thought, however, as soon as he had uttered the last words, and he did not seem to attend to her. His thoughts, indeed, were busy with a former part of their conversation. He felt that he was, as she said, in her power, and he saw very well how sweetly and delicately she was inclined to use power when she did possess it. He therefore asked himself if it might not be as well to put some check upon her violence, before it hurried her into anything that could not be repaired: for although Captain Moreton was fond of a little vengeance himself, yet he loved security better, and thought it would be poor consolation for being hanged, that he had spoiled all her fine schemes. He was still debating this point in his own mind, when, finding that he did not answer, she said—

"Do you hear? I say I will not have it, and you had better not talk of it any more; for if I take it into my head that you are try-

ing to get off and leave me here, I will take very good care that your first walk shall be into gaol."

"In which case," said Captain Moreton, coldly, "I would, by one word, break the bond between you and Lenham, and send you to prison, too. You think that I am totally in your power, madam; but let me tell you that you are in mine also. Our confidence, it is true, has not been mutual, but our secrets are so."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed the lady, turning deadly pale.

"Need I tell you?" asked her companion; "what I mean may be soon understood. You do understand me, I see by your face, so no more of this. I shall not go, because you do not wish it, and I proposed it only for your good; but now let us have some brandy-and-water, for the night is wonderfully cold for the season."

The lady made no reply, but sat looking down at the table, with her cheek still white, and Moreton got up and rang the bell. A woman-servant appeared, received his orders, and went away, and then turning to his companion, he pulled her cheek familiarly, saying—

“Come, Charlotte, let us have no more of all this; we had better get on well together. Have any of the servants been into the room to-night since I left you?”

The lady looked up with a sort of bewildered and absent air, saying—

“No, I think not. Let me see: no, no. I have been sitting writing and sleeping. I fell asleep for an hour, and then I wrote till you came back. No one has been in, I am sure.”

“While you were asleep they might,” said Moreton, thoughtfully.

“No, no,” she answered; “I should have heard them instantly; I wake in a moment, you know, with the least sound. Nobody has been in the room, I will swear.”

“Then you can swear, too, that I never left it,” answered Moreton, laughing; “I mean, that I have been here or hereabouts all night, in case it should be needed.”

The lady did not seem at all shocked at the proposal, for she had no great opinion of the sanctity of oaths, and when the servant returned with all that Captain Moreton had demanded, he asked her sharply—

“Where were you Kitty, when I rang, about an hour ago?”

"Lord, sir," replied the woman, "I had only run across to ask why they had not sent my beer."

"Well, I wish you would choose some other time for going on such errands," replied Captain Moreton, and there the subject dropped.

CHAPTER VII.

BEAUCHAMP took care to be back at Tarningham Park a full hour and a half before dinner-time; but schemes and purposes of making love or a declaration at a certain place and time, are never successful. Very often they are put off, and very often they are forced on by circumstances, and although there is no event of life, perhaps, in which the happy moment is more important, it is seldom met with or chosen. Such was the case in the present instance: Sir John Slingsby played third on one occasion, Mrs. Clifford on another, and when Mary, dear considerate girl, after breaking in for a moment, made a very reasonable excuse to retire, the dressing-bell rang as she

closed the door, and Beauchamp, knowing that he could not detain Miss Slingsby more than five minutes, would not attempt to crowd all he had to say into so short a space. He was resolved to say something, however, and as Isabella was about to leave him, he stopped her, asking if she knew that her father had invited him to pass the night there.

"Oh, of course," answered his fair companion, in a gay tone; "you do not think he would let you go to pass the hours of darkness amongst the Goths and Vandals of Tarningham. He would be afraid of your life being attempted. You do not think of going?"

"I have accepted his invitation," answered her lover, "because I have several things to talk over with Sir John, and on one subject also with you, dear lady. Will you give me some time in the course of to-morrow—a few minutes—nay, perhaps, an hour, alone?"

Isabella coloured and looked away; but she was thankful for a reprieve from immediate agitation, and she replied in a low tone, "Certainly—but I must go and dress, or my maid will be impatient."

But Beauchamp still detained her for a moment. "You are an early riser, I think," he

said ; “ will you take a walk before breakfast—down towards the stream ?—Nay, Isabella, why should you hesitate ? Remember, I have a history to give.”

“ I hope not a sad one,” answered Isabella, gaily, “ for I think I should be easily moved to tears just now, and I must not return with my eyes red—nay, Beauchamp, let me go, or I shall cry now.”

He instantly released the hand he had taken, and Miss Slingsby took a step away, but looked round, and returning at once, gave that fair hand back again, saying more gravely, “ What is the use of any long history ?—and yet it had better be. I will take a walk with you when you like ; for I must speak with you, too—but not now : there’s no time. So farewell for the present,” and she left him.

The dinner passed more quietly than Sir John Slingsby’s dinners usually did. The baronet’s spirits, which had risen immensely after the first pressure was taken off, fell again during the course of the day ; and for the first time in his life, perhaps, he was grave and thoughtful throughout the evening. Isabella had her store of meditations, and so had Mary Clifford. The mother of the latter was calm

and sedate as usual ; and Doctor Miles dry and sententious ; so that Beauchamp, happy in what he had done, and happy in the confidence of love, was now the gayest of the party. Thus the evening passed away, though not sadly, anything but very merrily ; and the whole party retired early to rest.

The next morning, Beauchamp rose and went down to the drawing-room, but there was nobody there. One of the housemaids just passed out as he entered, and he waited for about a quarter of an hour with some impatience, gazing forth from the windows over the dewy slopes of the park, and thinking in his heart that Isabella was somewhat long. Now, to say the truth, she was longer than she might have been, for Isabella had been up and dressed some time ; but there was a sort of hesitation, a timidity, a weak feeling of alarm, perhaps, which she had never known before. She shrank from the idea of going down to meet him, knowing that he was waiting for her. It would seem like a secret arrangement between them, she thought, and she took fright at the very idea. Then again, on the other hand, she fancied that he might imagine she was treating him ill not to go, after the sort of promise she

had made; and he had been so kind, so generous, so noble, that she could not treat him ill—nay, not even by the appearance of a caprice. That settled the matter; and, after about a quarter of an hour's debating with herself, down she went. Her heart beat terribly; but Isabella was a girl who, with all her gaiety and apparent lightness, had great command over herself: and that command in her short life had been often tried. She paused for a moment or two at the door of the drawing-room, struggled with and overcame her agitation, and then went in with a face cleared, a light step, and a cheerful air. Her hand was in Beauchamp's in a moment, and after a few of the ordinary words of a first morning meeting, he asked, "Will you take a walk, dear Isabella, or shall we remain here?"

"Do you not see bonnet on my head and shawl over my arm?" she said, in a gay tone; "who would stay in the house on such a bright morning as this when they have a free hour before them?"

"Come, then," he answered, and in two minutes more they were walking away together towards the wooded hill through which they

had passed with Mary Clifford and Hayward about three weeks before.

It is strange how silent people are when they have much to say to each other. For the first quarter of a mile, neither Beauchamp nor Isabella said a word; but at length, when the boughs began to wave over their heads, he laid his hand gently upon hers, and said—

“I think there can be no misunderstanding, Isabella, as to the words I spoke the night before last. Nor must you think me possessed of a very eager vanity if I have construed your reply as favourable to myself. I know you too well not to feel assured that you would not have so answered me had you been inclined to decide against my hopes. But yet, Isabella, I will not and do not consider you as plighted to me by the words then spoken till——”

“That is just what I was going to say,” replied Isabella, much to Beauchamp’s consternation. “I wished much to speak with you for the very purpose of assuring you that I do not consider you in the least bound by what you then said.”

She spoke with a great effort for calmness, but there was an anxious trembling of the

voice which betrayed her agitation, and in the end she paused for breath.

“Hear me—hear me,” she continued, as she saw Beauchamp about to reply; “since that night everything has changed. I then thought my father embarrassed, but I did not know him to be ruined. I looked upon you as Mr. Beauchamp; I now find you of a rank superior to our own, one who may well look to station and fortune in his bride. You, too, were ignorant of the sad state of my poor father’s affairs. It is but fair, then, it is but right that I should set you entirely free from any implied engagement made in a moment of generous thoughtlessness; and I do so entirely, nor will ever for a moment think you do aught amiss if you consider better, more wisely, I will say, of this matter; and let all feelings between us subside into kind friendship on your part, and gratitude and esteem upon mine.”

“You set me free!” said Beauchamp, repeating her words with a smile; “how can you? My dear Isabella, this is treacherous of you, to talk of setting me free even while you are binding me heart and spirit to you more strongly than ever. Not one word more upon that subject, my beloved girl. You must not

teach me that you think I am so sordid, so pitiful a being as to let a consideration of mere fortune, where I have more than plenty, weigh with me, for one moment—I am yours, Isabella, if you will take me—yours for ever, loving you deeply, truly—ay, and understanding you fully, too, which so many do not: but it is I who must set you free, dear girl; and I will not ask, I will not receive any promise till you have heard the story of my past life.”

“But you must have it,” said Isabella, raising her dewy eyes with a smile; “these things must ever be mutual, my lord. I am yours or you are not mine. But Beauchamp, we are coquetting with each other. You tell me you love me; I, like all foolish girls, believe. Surely there is no need of any other story but that. Do you suppose, Beauchamp, that after all I have seen of you, after all you have done, I can imagine for one moment, that there is anything in the past which could make me change my opinion or withhold my hand? No, no; a woman’s confidence, when it is given, is unbounded—at least, mine is so in you; and I need not hear of any tale of past days before I bind myself to you by that tie which, to every right mind, must seem as strong as a vow.”

"Thanks, dearest girl, thanks!" answered her lover, "but yet you must hear the story; not from my lips, perhaps, for it will be better communicated to you by another; and I have commissioned good Dr. Miles to tell you all; for I would not have it said or thought hereafter, by your father or by any one, that I have had even the slightest concealment from you."

"Not to me! not to me!" said Isabella, eagerly, and then added, laughing, "I will not listen to the good doctor; if there is anything that must be said, let it be told to my father."

Beauchamp smiled and shook his head, "You will think me sadly obstinate and exacting," he said, "but yet you must grant me as a favour, Isabella, that which I ask. Listen to our worthy friend the rector. His tale will not be very long; for many sad things may be told in a few words, and an account of events which have embittered my whole existence till within the few last days can be given in five minutes. I will tell Sir John myself, but the reason why I so earnestly wish you to hear all too, is, that no man can ever judge rightly of the finer feelings of a woman's heart. We cannot tell how things which affect us in one way, may

affect her ; and as there can be no perfect love without perfect confidence, you must share all that is in my bosom, in the past as well as in the future."

"Well," said Isabella, smiling, "as to obey is to be one of my vows, Beauchamp, I may as well begin my task at once. I will listen to the good doctor, though I confess it is unwillingly ; but still, whatever he says, it will make no difference."

Beauchamp replied not to what she said ; but the conversation took another and a sweeter turn, and as the words they spoke were certainly not intended to be repeated to the world, I will not repeat them. Time flies swiftly when love's pinions are added to his own, and Isabella coloured as, in passing the windows of the breakfast-room on their return, she saw the whole party assembled, and Mary occupying her usual post. While Beauchamp entered, and took the first fire of the enemy, she ran up to her room to lay aside her walking-dress ; but Sir John was merciless, and the moment she came in assailed her with an exclamation of "Ha, ha, young lady ! Early walks and morning rambles, making all your friends be

lieve you have eloped! I hope you have had a pleasant walk, Isabella, with this noble lord. Pray, were you talking politics?"

"Profound!" answered his daughter, with a gay air, though she could not keep the blood from mounting into her cheek.

"And what conclusion did you come to on the state of affairs in general?" continued Sir John, looking from Isabella to Beauchamp. "Is there to be peace or war?"

"First a truce," answered Beauchamp; "and then a lasting peace, the terms of which are to be settled by plenipotentiaries hereafter."

"Oh!" said Sir John Slingsby, now for the first time comprehending how far matters had proceeded between his daughter and his guest; and giving up the jest, he remained in thought for some time.

When breakfast was over and the party had risen, Beauchamp at once took his host's arm, saying, in a low tone, "Before any other business, I must crave a few moments' conversation, Sir John."

"Certainly—certainly!" said Sir John Slingsby aloud; and while Mary Clifford put her arm through Isabella's, with a heart full of kindly wishes and hopes for her cousin, the baronet

led his friend into the library, and their conference commenced. As might be expected, Beauchamp met no coldness on the part of Sir John Slingsby; but after a hearty shake of the hand, an eulogium well deserved upon his daughter, and an expression of his entire satisfaction and consent, the baronet's ear was claimed for the tale of Beauchamp's previous life. It did not produce the effect he expected; for although he had some acquaintance with Sir John's character and habits, he certainly did not anticipate the bursts of laughter with which the old gentleman listened to events which had rendered him miserable. But there are two sides to everything. And Sir John had all his life taken the risible point of view of all subjects. He laughed, then, heartily, declared it an exceedingly good joke, but no marriage at all; and it was only when he found that counsel learned in the law had pronounced it to be valid, that he began to look at the matter more seriously. As soon, however, as he heard the intelligence which Beauchamp had lately received from Paris, he started up from his chair, exclaiming, "Well, then, she's dead, and that's an end of it. So now I congratulate you, my dear lord, and say that the sooner the

marriage is over the better. I shall tell Isabella so, and she has no affectations, thank God ! But come, let us go to her. I must kiss her, and give her my blessing."

The whole conversation had occupied nearly an hour, and when Sir John Slingsby and Beauchamp entered the drawing-room, they found it only tenanted by Isabella and good Doctor Miles. Her face was uncommonly serious, one might say sad, and the worthy clergyman's was not gay.

"What is it, doctor?" cried Sir John Slingsby. "You look as grave as ten judges. Whose cat is dead?"

"James Thomson's," said Dr. Miles, drily ; "and thereupon I wish to speak with you, Sir John, for I suppose you will attend the funeral."

"You are a funny fellow, Dr. Miles," replied the baronet ; "I'll talk to you in a minute, but I must first give my daughter a kiss—the first she has had this morning, for she played truant, and is going to do so again." So saying, he pressed his lips upon Isabella's cheek, and whispered a few words that made her colour vary, and then linking his arm in that of Dr.

Miles, led him from the room, leaving his daughter and her lover alone together.

Isabella's face looked sadder and graver than Beauchamp had ever seen it; and, to say the truth, his heart began to beat somewhat uneasily, especially as for a moment or two she did not speak, but remained with her eyes bent down. "Isabella," he said, at length—"Isabella, you look very sad."

"How can I be otherwise, Beauchamp," asked the fair girl, holding out her hand to him, "when I have just heard a narrative of events which have embittered all your life? I grieve for you very truly, indeed, and sympathize with you as much as a woman can do, with one placed in circumstances in which she could never find herself. But indeed, Beauchamp, it shall be the pleasant task of my whole life to make you forget these past sorrows."

His hand clasped more warmly upon hers as she spoke, and in the end he sat down by her on the sofa; his arm glided round her waist, and his lips were pressed upon hers. She had not the slightest touch of Miss Biron about her; and, though she blushed a little, she was not horrified or shocked in the least.

"Then you do not blame?" he said, "and

notwithstanding all this, you are mine, dearest girl?"

"Why should I blame you?" said Isabella, with a smile; "you were not the person in fault—except, perhaps, in having drunk too much wine once in your life; and I suppose that is what all young men do, and old men too, very often; but the punishment has certainly far exceeded the offence; and as to being yours, Beauchamp, you know that I am—or at least will be, when you wish it."

Beauchamp took her at her word, and that evening there were grand consultations upon many things. Sir John Slingsby was a hasty man, and he liked everything done hastily. Love or murder, strife or matrimony, he would have it over in a hurry. Isabella, Mrs. Clifford, Mary, were all overruled, and as Beauchamp submitted to his fate as determined by Sir John without a murmur, the marriage was appointed for that day fortnight.

CHAPTER VIII.

How quietly one sits down to tell events in a tale like this, which made a vast sensation at the time they happened. One reason, I believe, why half the romances and almost all the histories in the world are so exceedingly dull, is, that the people who write them do not believe that the things they record actually happened—no, not even in the histories. They have a faint idea that it may have been so—some notion that such matters did very likely take place; but not that firm conviction, that deep and life-like impression of the transactions which they relate, that gives vivid identity to the narrative. There is always a doubt about history, which hangs round and fetters the

mind of the writer, and is even increased by the accuracy of his research. There is some link in the evidence wanting, some apparent partiality in the contemporary chronicler, some prejudice on the part of the near teller of the tale, which casts a suspicion over all. We cannot cross-examine men who died a thousand years ago, and we sit down and ask with Pilate, "What is truth?" The romance-writer has a great advantage. He has the truth within himself. All the witnesses are there in his own bosom. Experience supplies the facts which observation has collected, and imagination arrays and adorns them. In fact, I believe that, philosophically speaking, a romance is much truer than history. If it be not, it will produce but little effect upon the mind of the reader. The author, however, must not sit down to write it coolly, as a mere matter of composition. He must believe it, he must feel it, he must think of nothing but telling the truth—ay, reader, *the truth*—of the creatures of his own imagination. It must be all truth to him, and he must give that truth to the world. As they act, think, speak, in his own mind, so must they act, think, and speak to the public; and according to his own powers of

imagining the truth, regarding certain characters, so will he tell a truthful tale, or a mere cold fiction.

All the events which had taken place in Tarningham Park caused less bustle, though, perhaps, more profound sensations amongst the inmates of Sir John Slingsby's house than they did in the town and neighbourhood. How Mrs. Atterbury of the Golden Star—it was a hosier's shop—did marvel at all that had occurred! and Miss Henrietta Julia Thomlinson, the dress-maker, did first shudder at the thought of Sir John Slingsby's total ruin, and then rejoice with a glow of joy at the idea of Miss Slingsby's marriage to a peer *of the realm*. Then, again, there was a little bleary-eyed woman with white cheeks, slightly marked with the small-pox, and a sharp nose of red, who went about the town with an alarm bell in her mouth, spreading all manner of stories regarding Sir John Slingsby and the whole of the family at Tarningham Park. Miss Slingsby was actually sold, she said, and the money given had gone to clear the baronet of a part of his incumbrances; but she hinted that there was a heavy load behind, and declared decidedly that she should not like to have money

out upon such security. This lady proved an invaluable ally to Mr. Wharton; for that gentleman did not stomach his disappointment comfortably. He looked upon himself as very much ill-treated, inasmuch as he had not been permitted to fleece Sir John Slingsby down to the skin. He made his own tale good, however, quietly, assured everybody that notwithstanding his own heavy claim, and the great likelihood that there had existed of his losing many thousands of pounds, he should never have thought of proceeding against his poor friend, if he had not heard that Mr. Wittingham had determined to arrest him for that heavy debt. A person calling himself Lord Lenham, he said, had come to Sir John's assistance, indeed, but he much feared that no assistance would avail; and perhaps Miss Slingsby, though she was such a cunning manœuvrer, might find herself mistaken, for there was something suspicious, very suspicious, about some parts of the affair. He did not wish to say anything unpleasant, but there was something suspicious, very suspicious; and people might mark his words if they liked.

People did mark his words; and all set to work to inquire what the suspicious circum-

stances were, so that what between inquiries and answers, and hints, and inuendoes, and suspicions, and surmises, and gossiping suggestions, and doubtful anecdotes, and pure lies, the little town of Tarningham was kept in a state of most exceeding chatter and bustle for several days, and all day long, except at the feeding time, when the streets returned to their silent tranquillity, and not a soul was to be seen but poor little deformed Billy Lamb, first carrying out his tray of foaming tankards, and then plodding up the hill with a packet of letters and newspapers. As it is a fine day, and those large heavy floating clouds give frequently a pleasant shade, I do not see why we should not follow him up to Chandleigh Heath. How quick the little fellow's long, disproportioned legs carry his small round turkey-shaped body. But Billy Lamb must be going to visit his mother after he has fulfilled his errand, or he would not walk so fast this warm noontide. It is a round of six miles, yet he will do it in an hour and a quarter. On my life he is already on the heath. One can hardly keep up with him; and now he is at the cottage garden-gate.

What strange things poetical ideas are ! and

how unlike reality! The poetical idea of a cottage, for instance, is rarely very like truth. We take it, and cover it with roses, and surround it with flowering shrubs. That may be all very well, for there are such cottages; but then we strip it of all coarse attributes of life; we take away the evils of poverty, and vulgarity, and vice, and leave it nothing but content, and natural refinement, and calm innocence. The poetical idea of a cottage is neither the scene of struggles against fortune, cold, fireless, cheerless, often foodless, with want, smoke, and a dozen of children; nor is it the prim, false rosewood, bad pianoforted, abode of retired slopsellerism; nor the snug-embowered, back lane residence of the kept mistress. There is no misery and repining there, no bad English and gin-and-water, no quiet cabriolets and small tigers, black eyes, ringlets, flutter, finery, and falsehood. It is all love and roses—quarter of an acre of Paradise with a small house upon it. Such is the poetical idea of a cottage.

Such, however, was by no means the sort of cottage, the garden-gate of which was now approached by Billy Lamb. It had been built by a coarse, vulgar man, was inhabited by an arrant scoundrel; and there the arrant scoun-

drel was, walking in his small domain with the lady whom we have more than once mentioned. He looked sharply round when he heard the garden-gate squeak; but was perfectly composed at the sight of the little pot-boy. The letters and papers he took, and looked at the covers, and then, with an indifferent air, asked—

“Well, my lad, what news is stirring in your little town?”

“Not much, sir,” said Billy Lamb; “only about the marriage of the lord and Miss Slingsby.”

The lady’s eyes flashed unpleasantly, and her companion inquired,

“Well, what about that?”

“Nothing, sir, but that it is to be on Monday week, they say,” replied Billy Lamb; “and all the people are as busy as possible about it, some talking, and others working hard to get all ready; for Miss Isabella will have everything she can made in Tarningham.”

“D—d badly made they will be,” answered the gentleman; “and what is the lord about?”

“Oh, nothing that I know of, sir,” rejoined the potboy, “only all his people and things are coming down, carriages, and horses, and that. The yard is quite full of them.”

“ And so it is to be on Monday week, is it?” rejoined Captain Moreton; “ well, the sooner the better.”

“ Yes, yes,” cried the lady, “ and he may have guests at his marriage that he does not expect.”

She spoke with an ungovernable burst of feeling, before her male companion could stop her; and the boy suddenly raised his clear, intelligent eyes to her countenance, discovering there legible traces of all the furious passions that were at work in her bosom.

“ Oh, yes,” cried Moreton, endeavouring to give another turn to her indiscreet words, and pressing her arm tight, as a hint to hold her tongue; “ doubtless the whole town and neighbourhood will be there to see.”

“ Oh dear, yes, sir,” answered Billy Lamb; “ though they say they wish it to be quite private. Good morning, sir,” and he walked away, with a careless air, closing the garden-gate behind him.

“ Ha, ha, ha!” exclaimed the worthy captain, laughing aloud; “ this is capital, Charlotte. You see our trout has bit at the fly.”

“ And I have got the hook in his jaws,” said the lady, bitterly.

“Yes,” rejoined Captain Moreton; “and it is now high time that we should consider how we may play our fish to the best advantage. First of all, of course, the marriage must take place, or he will slip off your hook, my fair lady; but after that, comes the game; and I think it would be much better to make no great noise even afterwards, but to give him proof positive of your existence; and, by working upon his apprehensions, and laying him under contribution, we may drain him dry as hay.”

“I will have revenge!” cried the lady, fiercely; “I care for nought else, but I will have revenge; I will make him a public scoff and a scorn; I will torture him in a court of justice; I will break his proud heart under the world’s contempt. Try not to stop me, Moreton, for I will have revenge. You think of nothing but money; but vengeance will be sweeter to me than all the gold of earth.”

“There are different sorts of revenge,” answered Moreton, quietly; “and, depend upon it, that which I propose is much more terrible. Once he is married, and quietly informed that you are still living, think what pleasant tortures he would undergo, year after year, as long as you pleased. You would stand behind

him like an unseen, but not unfelt fate, shadowing his whole existence with a dark cloud. Every hour he would live in terror of discovery, and shame, and punishment. He would never see a stranger, or receive a letter, without the hasty fears rising up in his heart. He would picture to himself the breaking up of all his domestic joys; he would see 'bastard' written on the face of every child; and his heart would wither and shrivel up, I tell you, like a fallen leaf in the autumn. Sleep would be banished from his bed; appetite from his table; cheerfulness from his hearth; peace from his whole life. Even the sweet cup of love itself would turn to poison on his lips; and our vengeance would be permanent, perpetual, undecaying. This is the sort of revenge for me!"

"It does not suit me!" cried the lady; "it does not suit me! I will have it at once,—I will see him crushed and withering,—I will feast my eyes upon his misery. No, no; such slow, silent vengeance for the cold-blooded and the calm! I tell you, you shall not stop me!" she continued, fiercely, seeing that he listened to her with a degree of chilling tranquillity which she did not love. "You may

take what course you will; but I will take mine."

"Excellent!" said Captain Moreton, sneeringly; "excellent, my gentle Charlotte! but let me just hint, that we must act together. You can do nothing without me; I can stop it all at a word. Pray, recollect a little hint I gave you the other night; and now that the moment is come for drawing the greatest advantages from that which we have been so long labouring to attain, do not drive me to spoil all your plans, by attempting to spoil mine."

"Ha!" said the lady; "ha!" But she proceeded no further; and, sinking into herself, walked up and down musingly for several minutes, at the end of which time, she began to hum snatches of an Italian song. Captain Moreton, who knew well her variable humours, thought that the mood was changed; but he was mistaken. He had planted that of which he was to reap the fruit ere long.

In the meantime, the boy Billy Lamb, having closed, as we have said, the garden-gate, lingered for a moment, and then took his way across the common in the direction of Stephen Gimlet's house, which was at the distance of about a mile and a half. He went at a quick

pace, but two or three times he stopped, and thought deeply: he was an observing boy, and saw and heard more than people imagined; he was a boy of very strong feelings, also, and he had conceived an affection for Beauchamp, which made anything that touched that gentleman a matter of deep interest to him. Thus, the first time he stopped, he repeated to himself the incautious words the lady had uttered, syllable for syllable. "He may have guests at his marriage he does not expect!" said the boy, meditating. "She looked mighty fierce, too. I wonder what she meant? No good, I'm sure, by the way her eyes went."

He then walked on again about half a mile further; and this time it was a narrow lane he halted in. "You see, our trout has bit at the fly!" repeated Billy Lamb, evidently showing that he had heard a part, at least, of what had passed after he left the garden; "that trout he talked of must be Mr. Beauchamp—that's to say, the lord. I can't make it out. I'll tell Stephen: he seems to know a good deal about them all—or that good, kind Captain Hayward. He's a great friend of this lord's, and will let him know; for they mean him harm, or I am mistaken."

When he reached Stephen Gimlet's cottage, however, and opened the door, he found the outer room only tenanted by the little boy, who was standing upon a stool, looking over the pages of a large old Bible, illustrated with some grotesque engravings, in which Adam and Eve, very naked indeed, the serpent, with a human head in large curls, very much like that of a Chancery barrister, the same personage, in the conventional form of a satyr, together with a number of angels; and Noah's ark, with all its beasts, figured conspicuously.

In turning his head sharply round to see who it was that came in, the child let fall the leaves that were in his hand upon those opposite; and instantly out flew an old time-stained scrap of paper, which made a gyration in the air before it reached the floor. The boy instantly darted after it, and picked it up before Billy Lamb could see what it was. The pot-boy would then have taken it out of his hand; but the other would not give it up, saying, with a screaming tone—

“No, no, no!—it is granny's!” And the same moment the voice of Widow Lamb was heard from the inner room, demanding—

“Who have you got with you there, child?”

"It is I, mother," answered the deformed boy. "Is Stephen in? I want to speak with him."

"No, my poor William," answered the old lady, coming forth, and embracing her son; "he has been out a long while."

"Then, is Captain Hayward up stairs?" asked the youth.

"He is out, too," answered the widow. "He was out yesterday for the first time, and to-day we have had a grand party here—all the ladies in the carriage, and Mr. Beauchamp walking. Mrs. Clifford came so kindly to ask after me!—and so they persuaded Captain Hayward to go out with them—that is to say, Captain Hayward and Miss Mary, and Miss Slingsby with my Lord Lenham. They've gone all up to the hall; Mrs. Clifford in the carriage, and the rest on foot; and I should not wonder, Bill, if Captain Hayward did not come back here again."

"That is unfortunate!" exclaimed Billy Lamb; "I wanted so much to speak with him, or Stephen."

"Why, what is the matter, my dear boy?" said his mother; "if you will tell me what it is, I will let Stephen know when he comes back."

“Why, the matter is this, mother,” answered the deformed boy. “Stephen was asking me a great deal the other day about the gentleman who has got the cottage on Chandleigh Heath, and what his name is. Now, I have found out his name, and it is Captain Moreton.”

“Have nought to do with him, Bill!” cried the widow; “have nought to do with him! He is a base villain, and has ruined all who have had any connexion with him.”

“Why, I have nought to do with him, mother,” answered Billy Lamb, “but carrying him up his letters and newspapers; but I heard something there to-day which I thought Stephen might like to know; for I am sure he and the lady he has with him are plotting things to hurt this lord, who was so kind to poor Ste.”

“Ha! what did you hear?” asked the old lady; “that concerns me more than Stephen, for I know more about that lady.”

“She does not seem a very sweet one,” answered the boy; “for when I told the captain about Lord Lenham going to be married to Sir John’s daughter, she looked as if she had a great inclination to scratch somebody’s eyes out.”

“Going to be married to Sir John’s daugh-

ter!" exclaimed Widow Lamb. "Bill, are you sure that's true?"

"Quite sure. Haven't you heard of it?" said the boy. "All the people in Tarningham know it quite well; and a quantity of things are ordered."

Widow Lamb mused gravely for several minutes; and then, shaking her head, said in a low voice, as if to herself:

"I begin to understand. Well, what more did you hear, Billy?"

"Why, after a little talk," said the boy, "when they heard that the marriage was to be on Monday-week, the lady cried out, 'He will have guests at his wedding that he does not expect!' and her eyes looked just like two live coals. She did not say much more; for the captain tried to stop her: but, as soon as I had got through the garden-gate, I heard him laugh quite heartily, and say out loud, 'This is capital, Charlotte; you see our trout has bit at the fly.'"

"And so they have been angling for him, have they?" said Widow Lamb; "What more, my boy?"

"Why, I did not like to stop and listen, mother," said the poor deformed boy; "but I

thought it could not be all right; and, therefore, I made up my mind that I would tell Stephen, or Captain Hayward, or somebody; for that Mr. Beauchamp, who has turned out a lord, was always very kind to me when he was at the inn, and gave me many a shilling; and I should not like them to do him any harm, if I can stop it; and I could see they were wonderfully bitter against him, by the way of that lady and her husband."

"He is not her husband," said Widow Lamb, with a scoff; "but that matters not, Bill; you are a good boy, and have done quite right; and, perhaps, it may save much mischief; so that will be a comfort to you, my son. I'll tell Stephen all about it, when he comes back; and we'll talk the thing over together this very night, and see what can be done. It is strange, very strange, Billy, how things turn out in this world. Great people do not always know, when they do a kind action to poor people, and humble people like ourselves, that they may be helping those who will have the best means of helping them again. Now, from what you have told me, Bill, I may have the means of helping this good lord from getting himself into a terrible scrape. I am sure he

does not know all, my boy; I am sure a great number of things have been concealed from him; and your telling me may set it all to rights."

"Well, that's pleasant," answered the deformed boy. "It makes one very lightsome, mother, to feel that one has been able to do anything to serve so good a gentleman; and so I shall go home quite gay."

"That you may, Bill," replied his mother; "but bring me up news of anything you may hear; for you can't tell what may be of consequence, and what may not."

The boy promised to obey, and went away whistling one of the peculiar melodies, of which he was so fond; in which, though the air was gay, there was ever an occasional tone of sadness, perhaps proceeding from a profound, though concealed, impression of his corporeal infirmities.

It was late in the evening before Stephen Gimlet returned; but then Widow Lamb entered into instant consultation with him upon what she had heard; and their conference lasted far on into the night.

The next morning early, the gamekeeper got his breakfast, and then putting on his hat, said—

"Now, I'll go, Goody Lamb. I shall be very awkward about it, I dare say, but I don't mind; for he will find out in the end, that it is for his own good I talk to him about such disagreeable things. So, here goes!"

"You had better wait awhile, Stephen," said the widow; "most likely he is not up yet, for it is not seven o'clock."

"It will be well nigh eight before I am there," answered Stephen Gimlet; "and I can wait at the house till he is ready."

Thus saying, he walked away, and trudged on over the fields till he came into Tarningham Park, by the road which leads over the hill just above the house. He did not follow the carriage-drive, however, but took the shorter path through the chesnut trees, and in about ten minutes after entering the gates, saw the house. There was a travelling-carriage standing before the hall door, which was at the distance of a quarter of a mile, and hardly had Stephen Gimlet's eyes rested on it for an instant, when a servant got up behind, and the post-boy laid his whip lightly over his horses. The carriage rolled on, and the gamekeeper followed it with his eyes with a feeling of misgiving; but he pursued his way to the house

notwithstanding, and entering by the offices, asked the first servant he met, if he could speak for a moment with Lord Lenham.

"That you can't, Ste," answered the man, "for he has just gone off to London. He will not be down for a week either, they say; and then comes the wedding, my lad, so that you have a poor chance of talking with him till the honeymoon is over."

Stephen Gimlet looked down perplexed; and then, after a moment's thought, he said, "Ay, there is to be a wedding, is there? I heard something about it. He is a kind and good gentleman as ever lived, and I hope he may be very happy."

"I dare say he will now," said the footman, "for our young lady is fit to be the wife of a king, that she is. But as one marriage made him very unhappy for a long time, it is but fit that another should cure it."

"Then do you mean to say he has been married before?" asked the gamekeeper.

"Ay, that he has," replied the servant; "none of our people, not even Sir John's gentleman, nor any one, knew a word about it till I found it out. I'll tell you how it was, Ste. The day before yesterday morning the butler says to

me, 'I wish, Harrison, you'd just clear away the breakfast things, for I've got the gout in my hand'—he has always got the gout, you know, by drinking so much ale, besides wine. Well, when I went into the breakfast-room after they were all gone, I saw that the door into the library was a little a-jar; but I took no notice, and Dr. Miles and Sir John went on talking there and did not hear me at all in t'other room. I could not tell all they said; but I made out my Lord Lenham had been married a long time ago, but that the lady had turned out a bad un, and that they had lived apart for many years, till the other day my lord heard from Paris she was dead, and then he proposed to Miss Isabella. Dr. Miles said something about not hurrying the marriage, but the jolly old barrownight said that was all stuff, that he would have a wedding before a fortnight was over, and he'd broach two pipes of port and fuddle half the county."

"And when is it to be, then?" asked Stephen Gimlet; but the man's reply only confirmed what he had heard before, and with by no means a well-satisfied countenance, the game-keeper took his way across the park again, murmuring to himself as soon as he got out

into the open air, "Goody Lamb was right! They've cheated him into believing she is dead. That is clear. There is some devilish foul work going on; and how to manage I don't know. At all events I'll go back and talk to the old woman, for she has a mighty clear head of her own."

As he walked on, he saw our friend Ned Hayward strolling slowly along at a distance, and he felt a strong inclination to go up and tell him all he had been going to tell Beauchamp; but then he reflected that he had no right to divulge what he knew of the latter gentleman's secrets to another who might not be fully in his confidence. Besides, Ned Hayward was not alone. There was the flutter of a lady's garments beside him, and he seemed in earnest conversation with his fair companion. They were not indeed walking arm-in-arm together, but they were very close to one another, and as Stephen Gimlet paused, considering, he saw the lady's head frequently raised for a moment as if to look in her companion's face, and then bent down again as if gazing on the ground.

The gamekeeper judged from these indications that they were particularly engaged, and

would not like to be disturbed; and taking that with other motives for not going near them, he walked back to his own cottage, where he found Widow Lamb with her large Bible open before her.

Gimlet's story was soon told, and his mother-in-law seemed as puzzled as he did for a time. He then suggested for her consideration whether it might not be as well to convey the intelligence they possessed to Captain Hayward or Sir John Slingsby; but Widow Lamb exclaimed, at once—

“No, Stephen—no! we might make mischief with the intention of doing good. We must wait. He will come back before the marriage-day, and you must see him then. I will go up with you and talk to him myself; for I have much to say that I will only say to himself.”

“But suppose we should not be able to see him?” said Stephen Gimlet, “or if anything should prevent his coming till the very day.”

“Then I suppose we must speak to some one else,” replied his stepmother; “but do not be afraid, Stephen. Leave it all to me.”

Stephen Gimlet was afraid, however; for he was one of those unfortunate eager people, who, when they take the interests of another to

heart, are never satisfied till they see those interests perfectly secure. He had all his life, too, been accustomed to manage everything for himself, to rely upon no one, to trust to his own mind and his own exertions for the accomplishment of everything he desired. It is an unlucky habit, which makes people very uneasy when once they contract it, which trebles both their anxieties and their labours; for there is not above one-third, in ordinary circumstances, of anything that a man requires to do which can be done by his own hands, in the complicated state of society in which we live; but still Stephen Gimlet had that habit, and like an old coachman, he was not easy when the reins were in the hands of another.

CHAPTER IX.

AND what were Ned Hayward and Mary Clifford talking about? Wait one minute, and you shall hear all about it; but first let me pause to make only one remark. I have observed during some acquaintance with life, and a good deal of examination into all its curious little byways and narrow alleys, that the conversation which takes place between two people left alone to talk together, without any witnesses but green fields and bowery trees, is never, or at least very seldom, that which any one, even well acquainted with them, would have anticipated from a previous knowledge of their characters. It was an extremely right, just, and proper view of the case, that was

taken, when people (I do not know who) decided that three forms a congregation. We all know it: we all feel it instinctively. Three is a congregation; and when we speak before a congregation, we speak to a congregation.

But Mary Clifford and Ned Hayward were alone together; and now a word or two upon the frame of mind in which they met. Ned Hayward, since first we introduced him to our readers, had taken a great part in many things where Mary Clifford was concerned. He had first made her acquaintance in rescuing her gallantly from the brutal and shameless attempt to carry her off, of a man whom she detested. He had told her kindly and frankly of her uncle's embarrassed and dangerous situation. He had without the slightest ostentation offered the means of relieving him from the most pressing of his difficulties, and had gone up to London to accomplish what he offered, with a mixture of delicacy of feeling, and gay open-hearted readiness, which doubled the value of all he did. He had come down again, fought a duel with the man who had insulted her, received a severe wound, suffered, and put himself to great inconvenience; and then had been found prepared, at the moment of need, to

redeem his given word in her uncle's behalf, without hesitation or reluctance, though evidently at a great sacrifice.

Nevertheless, all these things might have gone no further than the mind—even with a calm, gentle, feeling creature like herself. Gratitude she could not have avoided entertaining, under such circumstances—respect—very high esteem; but she might have felt nothing beyond these three impressions, had that been all. There was a great deal more, however. Ned Hayward had disappointed all Mary Clifford's preconceived ideas of his character; and had gone on growing upon her regard every hour. She had found him thoughtful, where she had believed him to be heedless; feeling, where she had expected him to be selfish; full of deep emotions, where she had fancied him light; well-informed and of cultivated tastes, instead of superficial and careless; and, being imperatively called upon to do him justice in her own heart, she went on, and did, perhaps, something more. But still, this was not all; he had first excited wonder, curiosity, and pleasure, then admiration and esteem, then interest and sympathy. Tie all these up in a parcel, with gratitude for great

services rendered, and a great number of musings regarding him in silence and in solitude, and what will be the result? Day by day, after the duel, she had thought of him—perhaps, I might have said, night after night. Then, when she had seen him again, and knew him to be ill and suffering, she had thought of him with deeper feelings still, and even oftener than before; and when at length he came over with reviving health, and took up his abode in the same house with herself, she found a number of new sensations blending in her meditations,—and she fancied that she was studying his character all the while. What was it that she compared it to? She thought that it was like a deep, beautiful valley, so full of sunshine that no eye but one very near could see the fair things that it contained. I do not know what all this was, readers; but I think it looked very like falling in love.

Nevertheless, though these things might cause Mary Clifford to love Edward Hayward, the reader may suppose that they afforded no reason why he should love her—but that is a mistake. Love is like a cast and a mould, where there is an impression upon both, different, yet representing the same object. Love

at first sight—love which springs merely from the eye, is a thing apart; but love which proceeds from acts and words and looks, is generally, though not always, conscientious. The very deeds which, performed towards another, beget it in that other, beget it also in ourselves. A woman is cherished and protected. She loves the being who does cherish and protect her, because he does; and he loves her because he cherishes and protects. Ned Hayward had thought Mary exquisitely beautiful from the first; but that would not have been enough—he was not a doll fancier! But her conversation pleased him, her gentle sweetness charmed him, her situation, and all that it produced between them, interested him, and But he had thoroughly made up his mind not to fall in love; and that was all that was wanting to make the thing complete. There was only one difficulty or objection. Mary Clifford had what was called in those days a large fortune. The dean, her father, had been a wealthy and a prudent man; and he had left her about two thousand a year, her mother's jointure not included. Now, Ned Hayward had, as the reader knows, very little from the beginning; that little was now still less; and he had deter-

mined to hate all heiresses. Hate Mary Clifford ! Pooh, pooh, Ned Hayward !

However, a certain undefinable sensation of being very far gone in love—the perception of feelings he had never experienced before, had made him very sad and uneasy for the last five or six days. He would have run away, if he could; for he thought there was only safety in flight. But he could not go. He was not well enough to take a long journey; and he had promised Beauchamp to stay for his marriage. But marriage is an infectious disease; and, even in its incipient stages, it is catching. Ned Hayward thought a great deal of marriage during those five or six days, of what a lucky man Beauchamp was, and of how happy he would be if he had only a tithe of his wealth—with Mary Clifford. But Ned Hayward was not a man to find himself in a difficult and dangerous situation without facing it boldly. He felt that he had suffered himself to be entangled in a very tough sort of the tender passion, and he resolved to break through the net, and, in fact, quit Tarningham-house as soon as possible. But a few days remained to be passed ere that appointed for Beauchamp's marriage; and he fancied he could very well

get through that short period without any further danger or detriment. "He would see as little of Mary Clifford as possible," he thought; "he would employ himself in reading, in walking, in riding out with Sir John, as soon as he was strong enough; and thus, as usual with all men, he proposed to do a thousand things that he never did at all, and consoled himself with resolutions that could not be executed.

On the day of Beauchamp's departure for London, Ned Hayward rose early, breakfasted with his friend, saw him off, and then, according to the plan he had proposed, walked out into the fine sunny morning air, intending to spend the greater part of the summer day in some of the cool and more retired parts of the park.

It was, at least, two hours before the usual time of breakfast; he had not an idea that any of the family was up; and thus, pursuing one of the gravel walks away from the house, he went in among the chesnut-trees, and strolled on, fancying himself perfectly alone in the woods, when suddenly, in taking a turn, the path showed him the fair face and graceful form of Mary Clifford advancing towards him, at the distance of about fifty or sixty paces.

To avoid her, of course, was quite out of the question; but Ned Hayward resolved that he would only speak to her for a moment, and then go on. But, Heaven knows how it happened!—in about two minutes, he might be seen turning round with her; and their walk continued for nearly an hour and a half.

“Well, Miss Clifford,” he said, with as gay a look as he could command, “Beauchamp is gone. Have you been taking a long walk?”

“No, not very far,” answered Mary: “I saw some strange people crossing the park; and ever since that adventure which first made us acquainted with each other, I have become very cowardly. I therefore turned back; otherwise I should have much enjoyed a ramble, for I have a slight headache.”

What could Ned Hayward do under such circumstances? He could not avoid offering to escort and protect Miss Clifford—he could not even hesitate to propose it. Mary did not refuse, but her “Yes” was timidly spoken; and, instead of turning back with Ned Hayward through the wild wood walks, she made him turn back with her, and led him to the more open parts of the park, where the house was generally in sight.

A momentary silence had fallen over both before they issued forth from under the chesnut trees; and each felt some awkwardness in breaking that silence—the surest possible sign of there being very strong feelings busy at the heart; but Mary felt that the longer the silence continued, the more awkward would it become, and the more clearly would it prove that she was thoughtful and embarrassed; and therefore she spoke at random, saying—

“What a beautiful day it is for Lord Lenham’s journey! I envy him the first twenty miles of his drive.”

“I envy him in all things,” answered Ned Hayward; “his life may, and, indeed, seems likely to be, made up of beautiful days; and I am very sure that mine is not.”

“Nay, Captain Hayward,” said Mary, raising her eyes gently to his face, and shaking her head with a smile, “you are in low spirits and unwell, otherwise you would never take so bright a view of your friend’s fate, and so dark a one of your own. Many a fair and beautiful day may be, and ought to be, in reserve for you. Indeed, they must be; for your own heart lays up, by the acts it prompts, a store of sunshine and brightness for the days to come.”

“May it not rather lay up, by the feelings it experiences, a store of bitterness and sorrow, of clouds, and darkness?” asked Ned Hayward, in a tone so different from that he commonly used, that Mary started, gazed for a moment at him, and then, letting her eyes fall again as they met his, first coloured slightly, and then turned pale. By the marks of emotion she displayed, Ned Hayward was led to believe that he had spoken too plainly of what he had never intended to touch upon at all; and he hastened to repair the error.

“What I mean is simply this, my dear Miss Clifford,” he said; “a man who enjoys himself very much—as I do—feels pain in the same proportion, or perhaps more keenly. Every source of pleasure is an inlet to pain, and as we go on continually in this world losing something dear to us, day by day, I am occasionally inclined to envy those cold phlegmatic gentlemen who, with a very tolerable store of pleasures, have few pains but corporeal ones. I never pretend to be a very sentimental person, or to have very fine feelings, or anything of that sort, but now, as an instance of what I was speaking of, I cannot think of quitting this beautiful spot, and all the friends who have

shown me so much kindness, as I must do on Monday next, without a sort of sinking at the heart, which is very unpleasant."

"You do not mean to say you are going on Monday!" exclaimed Miss Clifford, pausing suddenly, with the colour varying in her cheek.

Ned Hayward was surprised and pleased; for there was no attempt to conceal that his staying or going was a matter of interest to her. He answered, however, gravely, even sadly—

"I fear I must."

"But you have forgotten your promised visit to us at Hinton," said Mary, reproachfully, and deadly pale; "you promised to come, you know; I have counted upon that visit, as affording an opportunity of settling how and where, when I come of age,—which will now be in a few months—the money you so generously lent me, can be repaid. Indeed," she added, earnestly, "you must come there for a few days, even if you do not stay here."

There was a tenderness, a tremulous softness in her tone, a slight yet sufficiently marked agitation in her manner, which made Ned Hayward's heart beat.

"Can I be beloved?" he asked himself.

“Can she return the feelings she has inspired? I will soon know! My dear Miss Clifford,” he replied, “I fear that visit would prove more dangerous to me than this has been; and therefore, however unwillingly—however great would have been the delight—I must decline it.”

Mary Clifford looked down, without uttering a word; but her cheek remained pale, her lip quivered, as if she would fain have given voice to some reply; and though her arm was not in his, he could feel that she trembled. Ned Hayward’s heart beat, too; but there was, as we have often seen before, a frankness, a straightforward simplicity in his habitual course of action, which overleaped many a difficulty that would have baffled other men.

“Let me explain,” he said; but Mary made a slight motion with her hand, saying—

“Oh, no, no!” in a faint tone, and then she repeated the word “dangerous!”

“Yes,” he said, “more dangerous, dear Miss Clifford! Can you not conceive how and why? In a word, then, I cannot and must not stay with you longer. I must, by as speedy a return as possible to other occupations, make an effort to forget that I have ever seen one whom I

fear I have already known too long for the peace of my whole life."

He paused for a moment, with a sigh, raised his head high the next instant, and then added, "I have but one favour to ask you, which is this—not to let what I have just said make any difference in your demeanor towards me during the short period of my stay. I had no intention of troubling your ear with such things at all; but your own question brought forth what I would willingly have concealed. Perhaps in this I have been wrong; but believe me, I am very well aware that difference of fortune has placed a barrier between us which cannot be overleaped. This is the only favour, then, dear lady—do not alter towards me—let me see you ever the same as I have yet beheld you; and when I go away for ever, let me carry with me the remembrance of Mary Clifford as a picture of all that deserves love and admiration upon earth. Do not, do not change, notwithstanding my rash confessions."

Mary Clifford looked up in his face, and a varying light played in her eyes, as if, at one moment, it was about to break forth sportively, and at another would have drowned itself out in tears.

“ I must change, Hayward !” she said at length, with a bright smile upon her lip, “ indeed you ask too much. How can you expect that I should live in the same house with you, and know that you love me, without showing in some degree what is passing in my own breast ?”

“ Mary ! Mary !” he exclaimed, laying his hand upon her arm, and gazing in her face, “ you would not—oh, I am sure you would not trifle with me——”

“ Not for the world,” she answered. “ I am incapable of trifling with any man ; but with you, to whom I owe so much, it would be base indeed !”

“ But the great disparity of fortune,” said her lover, with the shade again upon his brow. “ Oh, Mary, how can it ever be ? You, I have heard, are wealthy—they call you ‘ the heiress ’—and I know myself to be poor. Are you aware—surely I told you, that all I had saved out of the wreck of my father’s fortune, only amounted at first to——”

“ Will you pain me ?—Do you wish to grieve me ?” asked Mary Clifford, “ if not, do not mention such matters as in any way likely to affect my feelings or conduct ; and yet I do

not wish you to consider me as a romantic girl, for I am not. I have always thought that a competence must be possessed to render the lives of any two people happy; but surely it matters not on whose side that competence comes. We shall have enough, Edward, for happiness, and though I know it would have been more pleasant to yourself if the greater part of our little fortune had been brought by yourself, yet I am very glad that *I* have it, as you have not."

"But your mother—your guardians, Mary?" said Ned Hayward, still in a doubtful tone.

Mary laughed, but with a slight touch of vexation in the tone, and she exclaimed—

"I do believe he will not have me, even when I have almost offered myself to him!"

But Ned Hayward would not lie under that imputation, and he cast his arms round his fair companion, assuring her that if she had the wealth of the world, the only portion he would value would be herself.

Mary freed herself gently from his embrace; and suffering him to draw her arm through his, walked on with him till the breakfast hour was fully come.

CHAPTER X.

IT is strange how we all go grinding the fate of each other in this world, high and low, rich and poor, the cottage tenant and the lord of the mansion, all jostling each other, and without knowing it, each making his fellow take a step this way or that, which very much influences the onward path. All was cheerfulness and gaiety at Tarningham Park. Mary Clifford had assured Ned Hayward that her mother's consent would not only be given, but given cheerfully; that her guardians, whose period of rule was so nearly at an end, would raise no objection; and that all who loved her would be glad to see her the promised bride of one so well worthy of esteem. Nor was her

promise unaccomplished; for good Mrs. Clifford was delighted. Ned Hayward had ever been a great favourite of hers since he had come to her rescue in Tarningham-lane. The guardians were quite quiescent, replying to the letter of announcement, that whatever Miss Clifford judged for her own happiness, and received her mother's consent, would receive their approbation. Sir John was in an ecstasy, and Isabella, in the midst of her own happiness, felt happier still at that of her cousin. Daily letters were received from Beauchamp, all breathing joy and hope, and though lawyers were troublesome, and men of business dilatory, yet not one word was said, not one thought seemed to be entertained of any real danger or difficulty.

All, then, was cheerfulness and gaiety at Tarningham Park, and not one of its inmates had the slightest idea of the anxiety and alarm which were felt for them in a cottage not far off. Every morning and every evening, long consultations were held between Widow Lamb and her son-in-law, regarding the fate of Mr. Beauchamp, and just in proportion to their ignorance of the habits of the world were the difficulties that presented themselves to their

imaginations. Stephen Gimlet was anxious to act in some direction. Mr. Beauchamp, as he still frequently called him, being absent, he thought it would be better to say all that they had to say, to Sir John Slingsby, or at all events to Captain Hayward; but on the contrary, his mother-in-law, with longer experience, a disposition naturally timid and cautious, and upon the whole better judgment, insisted that it might be wrong or dangerous to do so.

“You cannot tell, Stephen,” she said, “what this good young lord has told them, and what he has not. We cannot even be sure how this woman stands with him. He may have divorced her for aught we know. I am sure her conduct has always been bad enough; and if such should be the case, we might make the poor young lady unhappy when there is no need. Nobody even can guess at all the mischief that might happen. No, no: you watch closely for the young lord’s coming back, and as soon as ever he is here, you and I will go up and speak to him. He must be back in time for that, and I dare say he will come on Saturday night, so there will be plenty of time.”

It was one of Stephen Gimlet’s maxims, and a very good one too, that “there never is

plenty of time;" but he carried the matter somewhat too far, for he thought one could never do too much. Now that is a very great mistake; for in love, politics, and ambition, as in the roasting of a leg of mutton, you can remedy the *meno*, but you cannot remedy the *più*. However, to make up for not doing what his mother-in-law would not let him do—and in regard to Beauchamp she had the whip hand of him, for she did not let him into all her secrets—he busied himself every spare moment that he had in watching the proceedings of Captain Moreton and the fair lady he had with him. His long familiarity with beasts and birds, greatly affected his views of all things, and he got to look upon these objects of his contemplation as two wild animals. He internally named one the fox and the other the kite, and with the same sort of shrewd speculation in regard to their manners, habits, and designs, as he employed upon brutes, he watched, and calculated, and divined with wonderful accuracy. One thing, however, he forgot, which was, that a human fox has a few more faculties than the mere brute; and that, although the four-legged fellow with the brush might require great caution in any examination

of his habits and proceedings, Captain Moreton might require still more. Now that worthy gentleman very soon found out that there was an observant eye upon him, and he moreover discovered whose eye that was. There could not have been a more unpleasant sensation to Captain Moreton than to feel himself watched, especially by Stephen Gimlet; for he knew him to be keen, shrewd, active, decided, persevering, one not easily baffled, and by no means to be frightened; one who must be met, combated, overcome in anything he undertook, or else suffered to have his own way. Captain Moreton was puzzled how to act. To enter into open war with Stephen was likely to be a very dangerous affair; for the proceedings of the worthy Captain, as the reader may suppose, did not court public examination; and yet to suffer any man to become thoroughly acquainted with all his in-comings and out-goings, was very disagreeable, and might be perilous. To gain time, indeed, was the great thing; for Moreton's intention was, as soon as he had fairly seen his cousin married to Isabella Slingsby, to take his departure for another land, and to leave the consequences of the situation in which he had placed Lord Len-

ham to operate, as he thoroughly believed they would operate, in destroying health, vigour, and life. His only object in remaining at all was so to guide the proceedings of his fair companion, and to restrain her fiery and unreasoning passions, as to prevent her overthrowing his whole scheme by her intemperate haste. But how to gain the necessary time was the question. He first changed his haunts and his hours—went out on the other side of the heath; but Stephen Gimlet was there—took his walk in the early morning, instead of late in the evening; but the figure of Stephen Gimlet was seen in the gray twilight, whether it was day-dawn or sunset; and Captain Moreton became seriously uneasy.

Nothing, however, as yet appeared to have resulted from all this watching, till, on the Saturday morning, somewhat to Captain Moreton's surprise, the door of the room, where he was sitting alone, was opened, and in walked his friend and acquaintance, Harry Wittingham. The young man was exceedingly pale; but still he appeared to move freely and without pain or difficulty; and a look of real pleasure came up in Captain Moreton's face, which completely deceived Mr. Wittingham, junior,

as to the sensations of his friend towards him. He fancied, as Captain Moreton shook him warmly by the hand, and declared he was delighted to see him well again, that the other was really glad at his recovery. Now, Harry Wittingham might have been wounded, sick, dying, dead, buried, turned into earth again, without Captain Moreton's caring one straw about him, simply as Harry Wittingham *per se*; but as one who might be serviceable in his schemes, who might help him out of a difficulty, and, by taking part in a load of danger, might aid Captain Moreton to bear the rest, he was on object of great interest to the Captain, who congratulated him again and again upon his recovered health, made him sit down, inquired particularly into all he had suffered, and did and said all those sorts of things which were most likely to make a man thus convalescent believe that a friendly heart had been greatly pained by all he had undergone.

Harry Wittingham was soon seated in an arm-chair, and making himself quite at home. Contrary to the advice of all doctors, he indulged in a glass of brandy-and-water at the early hour of half-past ten, and declared he was a great deal better for it, that old fool

Slattery having kept him without wine, spirits, or porter for the last five weeks.

“Ay, that might be necessary some time ago,” said Moreton, “till your wound was healed, but it is all stuff now. It must have been a bad wound that you have got, Harry ; and I am devilish sorry I could neither be down myself nor send Woolstapler, for I think then you would have got no wound at all. However, you gave him as good as you got, and that was some consolation. No gentleman should ever be without his revenge. Whether it be with cards, or pistols, or what not, he should always give something for what he gets, and if he does that, he has every reason to be satisfied.”

“I have not got quite enough yet,” said Harry Wittingham, with a significant nod of his head ; “and some people shall find that, by and by.”

“Ay, that’s right, quite,” answered Captain Moreton ; “but I say, ⁵/₂ Hal, how is the old cock, your father ? I heard yesterday he was breaking sadly—got the jaundice, or some devil of a thing like that—as yellow as one of the guineas he keeps locked up from you—time for him to take a journey, I should think.”

For a minute or two Harry Wittingham made no reply, but then he set his teeth hard, and said—

“I should not wonder if the hard-hearted old flint were to leave it all away from me.”

Captain Moreton gave a long, low whistle, exclaiming, “Upon my life, you must stop that. Hang me, if I would not pretend to be penitent, and play a good boy for a month or two !”

“It is no use in the world,” answered Harry Wittingham ; “you might as well try to turn the Thames at Gravesend as to put him out of his course when once he has taken a thing into his head. He must do what he likes ; he can’t take it all, that’s one comfort ;—but, I say, Moreton, what the devil is that fellow Wolf hanging about here for ? You had better not have anything to do with him, I can tell you. He is as great a scamp as ever lived, and I’ll punish him some day or another. I should have come in yesterday, but I saw him sitting down there upon the mound upon the heath, looking straight here, and so I went away.”

“Did you see him again to-day ?” asked Captain Moreton, with very uneasy feelings.

“Oh, yes,” answered Wittingham ; “there he was, prowling about with his gun under his

arm; but I doubled upon him this time, and went down the lanes, and in by the back way."

"I will make him pay for this," said Moreton, setting his teeth. "He has been spying here for a long time, and if it were not that I don't wish any fuss till the day after to-morrow is over, I would break every bone in his skin."

"It would be a good thing if you did," answered Harry Wittingham; "I'll tell you how he served me;" and he forthwith related all the circumstances of his somewhat unpleasant adventure with Stephen Gimlet when he visited the gamekeeper's cottage.

The moment he had done, Captain Moreton tapped him on the arm with a meaning smile, saying:—

"I'll tell you what, Harry, though you are not very strong yet, yet if you are up to giving me ever so little help, we'll punish that fellow before to-morrow's over. If you can come here to night, and take a bed, we'll get up early and dodge him as he has been dodging us. He is always out and about before anybody else, so that there will be no one to help him, let him holloa as loud as he will. He is continually

off Sir John's grounds with his gun and dog, so that we have every right to think he is poaching, as he used to do."

"Well, but what will you do with him?" said Harry Wittingham; "he is devilish strong, remember."

"Yes, but so am I," answered Captain Moreton; "and I will take him unawares, so that he cannot use his gun. Once down, I will keep him there, while you tie his arms, and then we will bundle him over here, and lock him up here for a day or two."

"Give him a precious good hiding," said young Wittingham, "for he well deserves it; but I don't see any use of keeping him. If we punish him well on the spot, that's enough."

"There's nothing that you or I can do," answered Captain Moreton, "that will punish him half so much as keeping him here till noon on Monday; for now I'll let you into one thing, Harry: I am looking out for my revenge upon some other friends of ours, and I have a notion this fellow is set to watch everything I do, with promise of devilish good pay, if he stops me from carrying out my plan. It will all be over before twelve o'clock on Monday; and if we

can keep him shut up here till then, he will lose his bribe, and I shall have vengeance. You can give him a good licking, too, if you like, and nobody can say anything about it, if we catch him off Sir John's grounds."

"I don't care whether they say anything about it or not," answered Harry Wittingham; "they may all go to the devil for that matter; and I'll lend a hand with all my heart. But remember, I'm devilish weak, and no match for him now; for this wound has taken every bit of strength out of me."

"Oh, you'll soon get that up again," answered Captain Moreton; "I'll manage all the rough work. But how do you get on about money, if the old fellow gives you none?"

"I should be devilish badly off, indeed," replied the young man, "if our old housekeeper did not help me; but she has taken her money out of the bank, and is selling some things for me; so I must not forget to let her know that I am here, if I come to-night."

"Oh, I'll take care of that," answered Captain Moreton. "There's a boy brings up my letters and things—a quiet cunning little hump-backed devil, who whistles like a flageolet, and says

very little to any body. I'll tell him to go and tell old mother what's-her-name sily, that you are here if she wants you."

The whole scheme seemed palatable to Harry Wittingham, and he entered into the details with great zest and spirit, proposing several improvements upon Captain Morton's plan, some of which suited that gentleman quite well. Another glass of brandy-and-water was added, and Harry Wittingham declared that it was better than all the doctor's stuff he had swallowed since he was wounded, for that he was already much better than when he came, and felt himself quite strong again. After an hour's rambling conversation upon all sorts of things, not very gentlemanly either in tone or matter, the two worthy confederates parted.

As the visitor took his way back to Buxton's Inn, he looked boldly round for Stephen Gimlet with a pleasant consciousness of coming vengeance; but the gamekeeper was not to be seen, and meditating the pleasant pastime laid out for the following day, Mr. Wittingham reached the inn, and ordered a very good dinner as a preparation. He felt a little feverish, it is true, but nevertheless he drank

the bottle of stiff port which was placed on the table when dinner was served ; and, elated with wine, set out as soon as it was dark to take part once more in one of those schemes of evil which suited too well his rash and reckless disposition, little knowing that all the time he was the mere tool of another.

CHAPTER XI.

“WELL, doctor—well, doctor, what is the matter?” asked Sir John Slingsby, at the door of his own house, towards two o’clock on that Saturday afternoon; “you look warm, doctor, and not half as dry as usual. I declare, you have made that fat pony of yours perspire like an alderman at the Easter ball. What has put you into the saddle? Has the chaise broken down?”

“No, Sir John,” answered Dr. Miles; “but the horse was sooner saddled than harnessed, and I wanted to see you in haste—where are you going now? for you are about to mount, I perceive.”

“I am going down to set the fools at Tarningham to rights,” answered Sir John Slingsby.

"I hear that bilious old crow, Wittingham, and deaf old Mr. Stumpforth, of Stumpington, have been sitting for these two or three hours at the justice-room getting up all sorts of vexatious cases with Wharton, to torment the poor people of the parish, and to put them in a devout frame of mind for their Sunday's duties; so I am going down to put my finger in the pie, and spoil the dish for them. Come along, doctor, and help, for you are a magistrate too, and a man who does not like to see his fellow-creatures maltreated. You can tell me what you want as we jog along."

"We shall be going exactly in the right direction," said Dr. Miles; "for my business with you referred to your magisterial capacity, Sir John."

The worthy Baronet, who had his foot in the stirrup, raised himself into the saddle with wonderful agility, considering his size and his age; and, accompanied by Dr. Miles, was soon on his way towards Tarningham, listening with all his ears to the communication which the rector had to make.

"You must know, my good friend," said the doctor, "that some short time ago your game-keeper, Stephen Gimlet, found in the little

vicarage church at Moreton some one busily engaged, as it appeared, in the laudable task of altering the registers in the vestry. He locked him safely in, but the culprit got out in the night; and Gimlet communicated the fact to me. I would have spoken to you about it, but circumstances occurred at that time which might have rendered it unpleasant for you to deal with that business."

"I understand," said Sir John Slingsby, nodding his head significantly, "who was the man?"

"Why, Gimlet asserts that it was no other than that worst of all bad fellows, Captain Moreton," replied Dr. Miles. "I examined the register, and found that an alteration had certainly been committed; for the date of one of the insertions was advanced several years before those that followed, by skilfully changing a nought into a six. Under the circumstances, I thought it best to consult with Wittingham, and I proposed that a warrant should be issued against Captain Moreton; but the worthy gentleman thought fit both to examine and cross-examine Gimlet in the first instance; asked him nine times over if he would swear that it was Captain Moreton; and,

when he found that he had not seen the man's face, his back being turned to the door of the vestry when Gimlet went in, he pooh-poohed the whole matter, and refused to issue the warrant. I did not choose to do so myself, the event having occurred in a parish of my own, and with one of my registers, but this morning, on visiting old Grindley, the sexton, who is very ill, he made a full confession of his part in the affair: Moreton had bribed him, it seems, to open for him the family vault and the door of the vestry. In the one the worthy Captain altered the date on his great-grandfather's coffin from 1760 to 1766 by an instrument he seemed to have had made on purpose; and in the vestry performed the same operation with plain pen and ink."

"A pretty scoundrel!" said Sir John Slingsby; "but I know what he wants. He wants to prove that his mother could not break the entail, which would be the case if the old man had lived an hour after she was born."

"Precisely so," said Dr. Miles; "but I did not choose to deal with Mr. Wittingham any more upon the subject, at least without your assistance; and therefore, before I either signed a warrant myself, or spoke with the people at

Tarningham about it, I thought it better to come up to the park and consult with you."

"As the wisest man in the county," said Sir John Slingsby, laughing. "My dear doctor, I will get a certificate from you and qualify for the university of Gotham. But I will tell you what we will do, we will send the groom here for Stephen Gimlet, and his evidence, with the deposition of old Grindley, will soon put the whole matter right. Here, Tom, ride over like the devil to Ste Gimlet's cottage; tell him to come down as fast as his legs will carry him to the justice-room at Tarningham. We'll soon bring these gentlemen to the end of their law, and Wharton to boot—an ill-conditioned brute, a cross between a fox and a turnspit—do you recollect his mother, doctor? Her legs were just like the balustrades of a bridge, turned the wrong side upmost, only they bowed out on each side, which gave them a kind of ogee."

Thus rattling on, Sir John Slingsby rode forward till they reached the entrance of the little justice-room, which was conveniently situated close to Mr. Wharton's offices.

The appearance of Sir John Slingsby and Dr. Miles did not seem at all palatable to the two other magistrates and their clerk, if one

might judge by the superlative courtesy of their reception. A chair was placed immediately for the reverend gentleman, Mr. Stumpforth vacated his seat for Sir John, as president of the magistrates, and Mr. Wharton, with malevolent sweetness, expressed his delight at seeing Sir John amongst them again.

"You did all you could to prevent it," said Sir John, taking the chair, "but it would not do, Wharton. Now, gentlemen, what are you about? we will not interrupt business."

"There are a good many cases down," said Mr. Wharton; "some of them excise-cases, some of them under the poor-law, some of them——"

"Well, let us get through them—let us get through them!" cried Sir John, interrupting him, "for we have business, too, which must be done."

"We must take things in their order," said Mr. Wittingham, drily.

"Oh, yes, according to the ledger," cried Sir John Slingsby, laughing; "everything in the regular way of trade, Wittingham, eh? Who is this? James Jackson, the publican," he continued, looking at the paper; "well, Wittingham, how does the debtor and creditor account stand with him?"

Mr. Wittingham winced, but replied nothing; and the case was regularly taken up. Some nine or ten others followed; and certainly everything was done by the two magistrates who had been found sitting, and their exceedingly excellent clerk, to tire out Sir John Slingsby and Dr. Miles, by protracting the investigation as long as possible. The poor persons, however, who had been compelled by the power of paper or parchment to appear in the awful presence of justice, had reason to thank their stars, and did so most devoutly, that the number of magistrates was increased to four. Several cases were dismissed as frivolous; very lenient penalties were inflicted in other instances; and, if the real truth were told, the person who suffered the severest punishment under the proceedings of that day was no other than Mr. Wittingham, upon whom Sir John Slingsby continued to pour for two long hours all the stores of sarcasm which had accumulated in his bosom during the last fortnight. At length, the magistrates' paper was over, and worthy Mr. Wittingham showed an inclination to depart; but Sir John Slingsby stopped him, exclaiming—

“Stay a bit, Wittingham—stay a bit, my good

sir ! The case with which we have now to deal you have already nibbled at ; so you must have your share of it."

"I am ill, Sir John," said Mr. Wittingham ;
"I am not fit."

"Not fit ! I have long known you to be," rejoined Sir John, and then added in a murmur, "for anything but a tall stool at the back end of a slopseller's shop ; but as to being ill, Wittingham—you don't pretend to be ill ? Why your complexion is as ruddy as if you had washed your face with guineas out of your strong-box. However, it is this business of Captain Moreton and his falsification of the register at Moreton Church that we have to deal with."

"I have already disposed of that," said Mr. Wittingham, sharply ; "and I am not disposed to go into it again."

But it was now Mr. Wharton's turn to attack Mr. Wittingham.

"You have disposed of it, sir !" he exclaimed, with all the blood in his body rushing up into his face ; "the falsification of the registers of Moreton Church ! why, I never heard of this !"

"There was no reason that you should," answered Mr. Wittingham, tartly ; "you are not a magistrate, I think, Mr. Wharton ; and

besides, you might, in some degree, be considered as a party interested. Besides, you were absent, and so I sent for Bacon, and dealt with the matter myself."

"Fried his bacon, and deviled the attorney," said Sir John Slingsby, with a roar; "you see, he is such an active creature, Wharton, he must be doing, whether right or wrong. I declare he cuts out so much matter for the bench in reversing all his sage decrees, that the rest of the magistrates can scarcely manage it."

"I did not come here to be insulted, Sir John Slingsby," said Mr. Wittingham, the jaundiced yellow of his face gradually becoming of an olive green, "I did not come here to be insulted, and will not stay for such a purpose; I expect to be treated like a gentleman, sir."

"Wonderful are the expectations of man!" exclaimed the baronet; "just as much might a chimney-sweeper expect to be treated like an archbishop, because he wears black—but let us to business—let us to business, if we go on complimenting each other in this way, we shall not get through the affair to-night, especially with your lucid assistance, Wittingham; for if there be a man in England who can so stir a puddle that the sharpest eyes shall not be able

to see a lost half-crown at the bottom, you are the man."

Up started the worthy magistrate, exclaiming in a weak voice and bewildered air—

"I will not stay—that man will drive me mad!"

"Impossible," shouted Sir John Slingsby, as Mr. Wittingham staggered towards the door; and he then added in a lower tone—"fools never go mad, they tell me;" but Dr. Miles, who saw that old Wittingham was really ill, rose from his seat, and crossing the room, spoke a word or two to the retreating magistrate, which he was not allowed to finish, for old Wittingham pushed him rudely aside, and darted out of the room.

Before I proceed to give any account of the further inquiries of the three magistrates who remained, I shall beg leave to follow Mr. Wittingham to his own house. About two hundred yards distance from the justice-room, he stopped, and leaned for a minute or two against a post, and again paused at his own gate, as if hardly able to proceed. He reached his dwelling, however, and after several attempts, with a shaking hand, succeeded in thrusting his private key into the lock, and opening the door. The

hall was vacant; the whole house still; there was neither wife nor child to receive and welcome him; no kindred affection, no friendly greeting to sooth and cheer the sick old man, whose pursuits, whose hopes, whose tendencies through life had been totally apart from the kindly sympathies of our nature. But there are times—steel the heart how we may—when a yearning for those very kindly sympathies will come over us; when the strong frame broken, the eager energies quelled, the fierce passions dead and still within us, the vehement desires either disappointed or sated, leave us alone in our weakness, to feel with bitter regret that there are better things and more enduring than those which we have pursued; and when the great moral lessons, taught by decay, are heard and listened to for the first time, perhaps too late to practise them. That lonely house, that silent hall, the absence of every trace of warm life and pleasant social companionship, the dull, dead stillness that pervaded everything, had their effect upon Mr. Wittingham, and a sad effect it was. All was so quiet and so still; all was so solemn and so voiceless; he felt as if he were entering his tomb. The very sunshine, the bright sunshine that, streaming

through the fanlight over the door, fell in long rays upon the marble-floor, had something melancholy in it, and he thought—"It will soon shine so upon my grave." What was to him, then, the satisfaction of the greedy love of gold, that creeping ivy of the heart, which slowly growing, day by day, chokes every softer and gentler offspring of that on which it rests? What was to him the gratification of that vanity, which was all that the acquisition of wealth had satisfied? Nothing!—all nothing. He stood there friendless, childless, companionless, alone; sick at heart, disappointed in all those expectations he had formed, having reaped bitterness from the very success of his labours, and finding no medicine either for the heart or the body in the gold he had accumulated or the station he had gained.

He paused there for a moment, whilst the deep and bitter anguish of the regret of a whole life took possession of him, and then staggering on into the trim, well-arranged, cold and orderly library, he sunk into one of the arm-chairs by the side of the fireless hearth, and rang the bell sharply. For two or three minutes no one appeared, and then he rang again, saying to himself—

"There never were such bad servants as mine; ay, ay, it wants a mistress of a house," and he rang again furiously.

In about a minute after the door opened, and Mrs. Billiter appeared, and Mr. Wittingham inquired, angrily, why nobody came at his summons? The housekeeper replied—

"That she thought the footman had come, but finding the bell ring again she had hastened up herself."

Mr. Wittingham's rage was then turned upon the footman, and after denouncing him in very vehement terms and condemning him to expulsion from his household, his anger either worked itself off, or his strength became exhausted, and he sat for a moment or two in silence, till Mrs. Billiter quietly began to move towards the door.

"Stay, Billiter," he cried; "what are you going for? I tell you I am ill, woman, very ill."

"I was going to send for Mr. Slattery," said Billiter, in a cold tone; "I saw you were ill, sir."

"Send for the devil!" exclaimed Mr. Wittingham; "that fellow Slattery is no good at all. Here have I been taking his soap-pills

and his cordial-boluses for these three weeks, and am no better, but rather worse. I will go to bed, Billiter—get me a cup of hot coffee—I feel very ill indeed.”

“You had better see some one,” said Mrs. Billiter, “for you don’t look right at all, and it would take some hours to get another doctor.”

“Well, well, send for the man, if it must be so,” said Mr. Wittingham, “but he does nothing but cram one with potions and pills just to make up a long bill. Here, help me up-stairs, I will go to bed, and bring me a cup of strong coffee—I declare I can scarcely stand.”

As soon as Mr. Wittingham was safely deposited in his room, Mrs. Billiter descended to the kitchen, and sent the housemaid at once for Mr. Slattery, taking care to spend as much time as possible on the preparation of the coffee, not judging it by any means a good beverage for her master, in which she was, probably, right. The surgeon, however, was so long ere he appeared, that she was obliged to carry up the coffee to Mr. Wittingham, whom she found retching violently, and complaining of violent pains. He nevertheless drank the coffee to the last drop, in the more haste as Mrs. Billiter expressed an opinion

it would do him harm; after having accomplished which, he sank back upon his pillow exhausted, and closed his eyes. The colour of his skin was now a shade of deep green, approaching to black under his eyes, and the housekeeper, as she stood by his bedside and gazed at him, said to herself that it would not last long. It must not be pretended that she was in any degree greatly affected at the prospect of her master's speedy demise, though she had lived in his service very many years, for he was not one to conciliate affection in any one, and her meditations were more of how she could best serve the graceless lad, whose disposition she had assisted to ruin, than of his father's probable fate.

While she thus paused and reflected, the quick, creaky step of Mr. Slattery was on the stairs; and the moment after, he entered the room, rubbing gently together a pair of hands, the fingers of which were fat and somewhat red, though very soft and shapeless, presenting the appearance of four long sausages and a short one. He had always a cheerful air, Mr. Slattery, for he fancied it comforted his patients, kept up their spirits, and prevented them from sending for other advice. Thus he would

stand and smile upon a dying man, as if he had a real and sincere pleasure in his friend's exit from a world of woe; and very few people could discover from the worthy gentleman's countenance whether a relation was advancing quietly towards recovery or the tomb. Thus, with a jaunty step, he approached Mr. Wittingham's bed-side, sat down, and as the sick man opened his eyes, laughed benignantly, saying—

“Why, my dear sir, what is all this? You must have been agitating yourself,” and at the same time he put his fingers on the pulse.

“Agitating myself!” cried Mr. Wittingham, “it is that old bankrupt brute, Sir John Slingsby, has nearly driven me mad; and I believe these servants will finish it. Why the devil do you leave my wig there, Billiter? Put it upon the block; don't you see Mr. Slattery is sitting upon it?”

“Well, I declare!” cried the surgeon, “I thought I felt as if I were sitting upon a cat or something of that kind. But, my dear sir, you must really keep yourself quiet, or you will bring yourself into a feverish state. The pulse is hard and quick now, and your skin is very hot and dry. We must make a little addition

to the soap-pill, and I will send you directly a stomachic cordial-draught, combined with a little narcotic, to produce comfortable sleep."

He still kept his fingers on the pulse, gazing into the sick man's eyes, till Mr. Wittingham could have boxed his ears, and at length he added—

"The draught must be repeated every two hours if you do not sleep, so that you had better have somebody sit up with you to give it you."

"I will have no such thing," said Mr. Wittingham; "I can't bear to have people pottering about in my room all night. I can take the draughts very well myself, if they are put down by me."

"But they must be shaken before taken," said Mr. Slattery.

"Well, then, I can shake them," said Mr. Wittingham; and the worthy surgeon, finding his patient obstinate, gave up the point. He proceeded to ask a variety of questions, however, to which he received nothing but gruff and grumbling replies, the worthy gentleman principally insisting upon receiving something which would relieve the great pain he felt in his side. Thereupon Mr. Slattery undertook

to explain to him all the various causes which might produce that pain; but the confused crowd of gall-bladders and gall-stones, and indurated livers, and kidneys, and ducts, and glands, conveyed very little tangible information to the mind of his hearer, and only served to puzzle, alarm, and irritate him. At length, however, the surgeon promised and vowed that he would send him all manner of remedies for his evils, and spoke in such a confident tone of his being better on the next day, or the day after, that he left him more composed. The housekeeper followed Mr. Slattery out of the room, but did not think fit to make any observation till they reached the foot of the stairs, when she touched Mr. Slattery gently on the arm and beckoned him into the dining-room, "He seems in a bad way, sir," said the housekeeper.

"A case of jaundice, Mrs. Billiter," replied the surgeon, raising his eyebrows, "which is never very pleasant."

"But I want to know if there is any danger, Mr. Slattery," continued Mrs. Billiter; "it is very necessary that people should be aware."

"Why, there is always danger in every disease," answered the surgeon, who abominated

a straightforward answer to such questions ; but then, bethinking himself, and seeing that it might be better to be a little more explicit, he added, " Jaundice, even the green, or black jaundice, as it is sometimes called, which your master has, is not in itself by any means a dangerous disease ; but there are accidents, which occur in the progress of an illness, that may produce very fatal results, sometimes in a moment. This is by no means uncommon in jaundice. You see the cause of that yellow, or green tint of the skin and eyes is this, either in consequence of biliary calculi, or the constriction of the ducts leading from the gall-bladder, or [pressure upon the gall-bladder itself, the bile is prevented from flowing, as it naturally does, into the intestinal canal."

" Lord 'a mercy !" cried Mrs. Billiter, " what do I know of all such stuff ? I never heard of people having canals in their inside before, or ducks either, except when they had eaten them roasted ; and that I'll swear my master hasn't for the last two months. Gall he has, sure enough, and bitterness, too, as the Scripture says."

" Wait a moment—wait a moment, and you will see it all clearly directly," said the worthy

surgeon. "As I have said, the bile being thus prevented from flowing in its natural course, is absorbed into the vascular system; and, as long as it is deposited merely on the mucous membrane, showing itself, as we see, in the discoloration of the cuticle, no harm ensues; but the deposition of the smallest drop of bile on the membranes of the brain acts as the most virulent poison on the whole nervous system, and sudden death very frequently follows, sometimes in five minutes, sometimes in an hour or two. Now this was the reason why I wished you to sit up with him to-night; but, as he wont hear of it, it can't be helped; and one thing is certain, that even if you were there, you could do no good, should such a thing occur; for I know no remedial means, any more than for the bite of a rattlesnake."

"I wish he would see his son," said Mrs. Billiter; "but you told him he would be better to-morrow or the next day, and so there is no hope of it; for, unless he is frightened out of his wits, he would fly into a fury at the very name of the thing."

"Well, wait till to-morrow — wait till to-morrow," said Mr. Slattery, "and if I find that it wont hurt him, I will frighten him a bit. I

don't see that there is any danger just at present, if he keeps himself quiet ; and he must not be irritated on any account. However, if I were you, I would be ready to go to him directly, if he rings his bell ; and in the meantime I'll send him the composing draught."

Notwithstanding Mr. Slattery's composing draughts, Mr. Wittingham passed a wretched night. He was feverish, heated, full of dark and horrible fancies, hearing the blood going in his head like a mill, and thinking of everything that was miserable within the whole range of a not very extensive imagination. He bore it obstinately for some hours, taking the potions by his bedside, within even less than the prescribed intervals, but finding no relief. At length, he began to wonder if people would hear him when he rang. He found himself growing weaker and more weak ; and he suffered exceeding pain, till darkness, and the torture of his own thoughts, became intolerable ; and stretching out his hand, he rang the bell, about three o'clock in the morning. The old housekeeper, who had remained dressed close at hand, was in the room in a moment ; and Mr. Wittingham felt as much pleased and grateful as it was in his nature to feel. She

did her best to soothe and comfort him; and, just as the light was coming in, the sedative medicines which he had taken began to produce some effect, and he fell into a heavy sleep. Nevertheless, when Mr. Slattery visited him, he found no great improvement; but a warm bath produced some relief. The worthy surgeon began to fancy, however, from all the symptoms which he saw, that he was likely to lose a patient of some importance; and he judged that it might be as well to establish a claim upon that patient's successor. He therefore determined to take the advocacy of Harry Wittingham's cause upon himself; and, in order to prepare the way for what he had to say in the evening, he gave the worthy gentleman under his hands a significant hint that he was in a good deal of danger.

Mr. Wittingham heard the announcement in silence, closed his eyes, compressed his lips, and seemed more terribly affected than the worthy surgeon had at all expected. He therefore judged it best to throw in a little consolation before he proceeded further, and he continued, in a soothing and cajoling tone—

“I know you to be a man of strong mind, my dear sir, and not likely to be depressed at

the thought of a little peril. Therefore, if I had thought the case hopeless, I should have told you so at once. It is not so, however, at all; and I only wish to warn you that there was some danger, in order to show you the necessity of keeping yourself quite quiet, and taking great care."

Mr. Wittingham answered not a word; and, after a very unpleasant pause, the surgeon took his leave, promising to come again in the evening.

When he did return, Mr. Slattery found his patient wonderfully composed, as he thought. Nevertheless, there was an awkward something about the pulse, a sort of heavy, suppressed jar, which did not make him augur very favourably of his prospects. As he sat by the bedside, with his fingers upon the wrist, and his eyes half shut, as if considering all the slightest indications which might be afforded by that small agitated current, which beat and quivered beneath his touch, what was Mr. Slattery reflecting upon? Not Mr. Wittingham's state, except as far as it was to influence his conduct in a non-medical capacity. He said to himself—or thought, which is the same thing—"This old gentleman will go. He has not stamina

to struggle with such a disease. As I can do little for the Wittingham present, I may as well do what I can for the Wittingham to come. If I show myself his friend, he may show himself mine; and though, perhaps, the discussion may make life's feeble tide ebb a little faster, it is not much matter whether it be low water half an hour sooner or later."

Mrs. Billiter, however, did not happen to be in the room at the moment, and Mr. Slattery resolved to have a witness to his benevolent proceedings. He therefore asked numerous questions, and discussed various important points affecting the sick man's health, till the good housekeeper appeared. He then gradually led the conversation round to young Harry Wittingham, remarking that he had had a long drive since the morning, and speaking of Buxton's Inn as one of the places at which he had called.

"By the way, I did not see your son, my dear sir," he added; "he was out. Indeed, he may be considered as quite well now, and only requires care of himself, kind attention from others, and a mind quiet and at ease."

Mr. Wittingham said not a word, and Mr. Slattery mistook his silence entirely. "I now

think, my dear sir," he continued, "that it would be a great comfort to you if you would have him home. Under present circumstances it would be advisable, I think—I do, indeed."

Then the storm burst, then the smothered rage broke forth with fearful violence. I will not repeat all Mr. Wittingham said, for a great deal was unfit for repetition. He cursed, he swore, he gave Mr. Slattery over to perdition, he declared he would never let his son darken his doors again, that he had cast him off, disinherited him, trusted he might come to beg his bread. He told the surgeon to get out of his house, and never to let him see him again; he vowed that he was glad he was dying, for then that scoundrel, his son, would soon find out what it was to offend a father, and would understand that he could not make his peace whenever he pleased by sending any pitiful little pimping apothecary to try and frighten him into forgiveness. In vain Mr. Slattery strove to speak, in vain he endeavoured to excuse himself, in vain he took a tone of authority, and told his patient he would kill himself, if he gave way to such frantic rage. Again and again Mr. Wittingham, sitting bolt upright in bed, with a face black and green

with wrath and jaundice, told him to get out of the house, to quit the room, to close the books and strike a balance ; and at length the surgeon was fairly driven forth, remonstrating and protesting, unheard amidst the storm of his patient's words.

Mrs. Billiter did not think fit to follow him, for she knew her master well, and that his ever-ready suspicions would be excited by the least sign of collusion. Besides, she was not altogether well pleased that Mr. Slattery had thought fit to take the business out of her hands without consulting her, and had thus made, as she termed it, a fine kettle of fish of the whole affair. Thus she acted perfectly honestly, when Mr. Wittingham turned upon her as soon as the surgeon was gone, exclaiming—

“What do you think of all this, woman? What do you think of his impertinence?”

And she replied, “I think him a meddling little fool, sir.”

“Ay, that he is, Billiter—that he is!” answered Mr. Wittingham; “and I believe he has tried to frighten me, just to serve his own purposes. But he shall find himself mistaken, that he shall.—He has done me harm enough,

though—putting me in such a passion. My head aches as if it would split,” and Mr. Wittingham pressed his hand upon his forehead, and sunk back upon his pillow.

By this time night was falling fast; and Mrs. Billiter retired to obtain lights; when she returned, Mr. Wittingham seemed dozing, exhausted, as she thought, by the fit of passion, to which he had given way. Sitting down, therefore, at a distance, she took up a book and began to read. It was one of those strange, mystical compositions, the product of a fanatical spirit carried away into wild and daring theories regarding things wisely hidden from the eyes of man, in which, sometimes, by one of the strange contrarieties of human nature, the most selfish, material, and unintellectual persons take great delight. It was called the “Invisible World Displayed,” and it had been lately bought by Mr. Wittingham, since he had fallen into the melancholy and desponding state, which usually accompanies the disease he laboured under. For more than an hour Mrs. Billiter went on reading of ghosts, and spirits, and phantoms, and devils, till her hair began to stand erect under her thick cushion-cap. But still there was a sort of fascination about

the book which carried her on. She heard her master breathing hard close by ; and more than once she said to herself, “ He’s getting a good sleep now, at all events.” At length, she began to think the sleep lasted somewhat long ; and, laying down the book, she went and looked in between the curtains. He had not moved at all, and was snoring aloud ; so, as the clock had struck eleven, she thought she might as well send the other servants to bed, resolving to sit up in his room and sleep in the great chair. About a quarter of an hour was occupied in this proceeding, and in getting some refreshment ; and, when she returned, opening the door gently, she heard the same sonorous breathing ; and, seating herself again, she took up the book once more, thinking : “ I dare say he will wake soon ; so I had better not go to sleep, ere I have given him the other draught.”

Wonderful were the tales that she there read, of people possessed of miraculous warnings, and of voices heard, and of apparitions seen in the dead hour of night. Tarningham clock struck twelve, whilst she was still poring over the pages ; but, though she was a good deal excited by what she read, fatigue and watching would have their effect ; and her eyes became

somewhat heavy. To cast off this drowsiness, she rose and quietly put the room in order; then sat down again, and had her hand once more upon the book, when suddenly the heavy breathing stopped for a minute. "He is going to wake now," said Mrs. Billiter to herself; but scarcely had the thought passed through her mind, when she heard a sudden sort of rattling and snorting noise from the bed; and, jumping up in alarm, she ran forward, and drew back the curtain. The light fell straight upon the face of the sick man; and a horrible sight it presented. The features were all in motion; the eyes rolling in the head; the teeth gnashing together; foam issuing from the mouth; and the whole limbs agitated, so that the bed-clothes were drawn into a knot around him. Mr. Wittingham, in short, was in strong convulsions.

Mrs. Billiter was, naturally, greatly alarmed; and her first impulse was to run to the door to call for help; but suddenly a new view of the case seemed to strike her: "No, I won't," she said; and, going back, she got some harts-horn, and applied it to Mr. Wittingham's nostrils, sprinkled some water on his face, wetted his temples, and did everything she

could think of to put an end to the fit. It continued violently for several minutes, however; and she thought, "Perhaps he ought to be bled; I ought to send for Slattery, I do believe;" but at that moment the spasm seemed relaxed; the contorted limbs fell languid; a calm expression spread over the features; the eyelids fell heavily, rose, and fell again; and though the fingers continued to grasp the bed-clothes, it was with no violence. "He is getting better," said the housekeeper to herself. The next moment the motions of the hands ceased; a sharp shudder passed over the whole frame; the chest heaved and fell; then came a deep sigh; and the eyes opened; the jaw dropped; all became motionless; there was not a sound.

Mrs. Billiter listened. Not the rustle of the lightest breath could be heard. She held the candle close to his eyes; the eyelids quivered not; the pupil did not contract. A cold, damp dew stood upon the sunken temples; and all was still, but it was the stillness of death.

The housekeeper set down the candle on the chair, and gazed at him for two or three minutes, almost as motionless as the dead body before her; then, suddenly starting, she said in a low tone: "There is no time to be lost; I must

think of the poor boy; for he was a hard-hearted old man; and there is no knowing what he may have done. She pressed her hand upon her forehead tightly for a minute or two, in deep thought; then putting the candle on the table at a distance from the bed-curtains, she went out, ran upstairs, and called up the footman, waiting at his door till he came out.

"Master is very ill, John," said Mrs. Billiter; "I don't think he will get through the night, so you must run up——"

"And bring down Mr. Slattery," said the footman, interrupting her.

"No," answered the housekeeper; "Slattery said he could do no good, and master and he had a sad quarrel; but you must go and call Mr. Harry. Tell him to come down directly, and not to lose a minute."

"I had better take the horse," said the man, "for Buxton's Inn is a good bit of a way."

"He is not at Buxton's Inn," answered Mrs. Billiter; "but at Morris's little cottage on Chandleigh-heath. You can take the horse if you like, but be quick about it for Heaven's sake. It is a clear, moonlight night, and you can gallop all the way."

"That I will," said the man, and ran down stairs.

Without calling any one else, Mrs. Billiter returned to the chamber of death, looked into the bed for a moment or two and saw that all was still. She knew he was dead right well; but yet it seemed strange to her that he had not moved. There was something awful in it, and she sat down upon a chair and wept. She had not loved him; she had not esteemed or respected him; she had known him to be harsh, cruel, and unkind, but yet there was something in seeing the life of the old man go out, solitary, untended by kindred hands, without a friend, without a relation near; with bitterness in his spirit, and enmity between him and his only child, that moved the secret sources of deep emotion in the woman's heart, and opened the fountain of tears.

While she yet wept, she heard the horse's feet pass by towards Chandleigh-heath, and then for about an hour all was silent. Buried in deep sleep, the inhabitants of the little town knew not, cared not, thought not, of all that was passing in the dwelling of their rich neighbour. At length a distant sound was heard of hoofs beating fast the hard road; it came nearer and nearer; and starting up, Mrs. Billiter ran down stairs with a light in her

hand, and opened the hall door. The next moment she heard the garden-gate opened, and a figure came forward leading a horse.

Casting the rein over the beast's neck, and giving it a cut with the whip to send it towards the stables, Harry Wittingham sprang forward, ran up the steps, and entered the house. His face was not pale but flushed, and his eyes fiery.

"Ah, Master Harry," said Mrs. Billiter, as soon as she saw him, "he is gone!"

"Gone!" exclaimed Harry Wittingham; "do you mean he is dead?"

"Yes," answered the old woman; "but come up, sir—come up, there is much to be thought of."

Without a word the young man stood beside her, whilst she closed and locked the door, and then followed her up stairs to his dead father's room. She suffered him to gaze into the bed for a minute or two, with haggard eyes and heavy brow, but then she touched his arm, saying—

"Master Harry, Master Harry, you had better think of other things just now. He was very hard upon you, and I can't help thinking tried to do you wrong. Four or five days ago

he wrote a great deal one afternoon, and then told me afterwards ‘he had remembered me in his will.’ You had better see what that will is—he kept all the papers he cared most about in that table drawer—the key hangs upon his watch-chain.”

With shaking hands Harry Wittingham took up the watch, approached the table and opened the drawer with the key. There were several papers within and different note-books, but one document lay at the top with a few words written on the outside, and the young man instantly took it up, opened and began to read it. Mrs. Billiter gazed at him, standing at a distance, with a look of anxiety and apprehension. When he had read about a dozen lines, his face assumed a look of terrible distress: he dropped the paper from his hand, and sinking into a chair, exclaimed—

“Good God! he thought I shot at him!”

“But you didn’t? — you didn’t, Master Harry?”

“I?—I never thought of it!” exclaimed Harry Wittingham.

Mrs. Billiter ran forward, picked up the paper, and put it into his hand again.

“There’s a large fire in the kitchen to keep

water hot," she said, in a low whisper; "all the maids are in bed, and the man has not come back yet, but he won't be long; be quick, Master Harry, be quick."

The young man paused, gazed thoughtfully at the paper for a moment or two, then took up the light and hurried out of the room.

CHAPTER XII.

WE must go back to an early hour of that same Sunday morning, and to the cottage of Stephen Gimlet, near the little church. Both Stephen himself and his mother-in-law had risen betimes; and the boy was still sleeping in his bed. The old lady spent three-quarters of an hour in writing an epistle, with her spectacles on her nose; while her son-in-law ate his breakfast; and when the act of composition was over, she folded up in the letter an old piece of paper, partly printed, partly written, the very same, in fact, which had flown out of her family Bible one morning, when poor Billy Lamb, coming in, had found the book in the hands of Stephen Gimlet's little boy. She

then added thereto an old, somewhat crumpled, and well-worn letter, first reading over the address attentively, got a light and a small piece of red sealing-wax, sealed the letter, and stamped it with the end of her thimble.

"There, Stephen," she said, giving the letter to her son-in-law: "he is back now, that's certain; take that up to him, and tell him, that if he wants to hear any more about it, I can give him information of the whole. I know all the names, and I believe the minister is alive still. I would not go out of the house, if I were you, till I saw him; and, if by any chance he should not be come down yet, I would hang about and catch him, when he arrives; for it is only just right he should know how the whole matter stands, before he goes any further."

"I won't miss him this time, goody," said Ste Gimlet; "so you and the boy get your dinner, if I should not come back in time. I am very uneasy at its not having been done before; for we poor people cannot tell what may come of such things with great folks, and after all you tell me, I am very sure that blackguard fellow, Moreton, is not hanging about here for any good."

Thus saying, Stephen Gimlet put the letter carefully up, and went away, as usual, with his gun in his hand, and his dog following. It was not yet more than half-past five o'clock; and, recollecting that the servants of Sir John Slingsby were not very matutinal in their habits, the gamekeeper thought he might as well go upon one of his rounds, which led him near to Chandleigh Heath, and see if he could get any inkling of Captain Moreton's proceedings. He walked slowly along up the lane from his own house, crossed the high-road from Tarningham to London, and then taking a path across the fields, soon came to another lane, which led him to a sandy way, having a high hedge with elm-trees on the left, and Chandleigh-heath on the right. It was sunk down some way beneath the rest of the country, so as to give no prospect over the common; but, a couple of hundred yards further on, a footpath went up over the bank, and divided into two, something after the fashion of a bird's merrythought, one branch leading to an old tumulus, and the other, which was much shorter, running down to the cottage inhabited by Captain Moreton. About twenty yards before he reached this turning, the dog, which

followed at Stephen Gimlet's heels, began to growl in a somewhat angry manner; and the gamekeeper turned round to look in what direction the beast's eyes were bent. Before he could ascertain what was the matter, however, a man suddenly sprang over the hedge, and cast himself upon him, seizing the barrel of his gun with both hands.

A fierce struggle ensued; for Stephen Gimlet at once perceived who his adversary was; and the gamekeeper, though taken unawares, was decidedly getting the better, when he suddenly found his arms seized from behind, and a cord passed quickly round them. The next instant the cord was drawn tight, in spite of all his efforts; but at the same moment he had the satisfaction of hearing the voice of Harry Wittingham exclaim, "Damn the dog! he has bit me to the bone!" and, as his legs were free, he made so strenuous an application of his thick-nailed shoes to the shins of Captain Moreton, that the respectable gentleman let go his hold; and, darting away, Stephen Gimlet ran forward, as fast as he could, in the hope of meeting some one who would render him assistance. I have said that his assailants sprang upon him from behind; and, consequently, the

only paths open for the fugitive were those which led towards the cottage or to the tumulus on the heath. In the latter direction he was not likely to find any one to help him; but down the lane, which passed close by the cottage, were a number of poor men's houses, the inhabitants of which usually went out to work about that hour. It is a pity that Stephen Gimlet did not recollect that it was Sunday; but so it was; and the good labourers were taking an additional nap to refresh them after the toils of the week.

No one knows how much one limb aids another, even in the peculiar functions of the latter, till some deprivation has taken place. Now, at the first consideration, we should say, that a man did not run with his arms; but yet the arms help a man very much in running; and Stephen Gimlet soon found, to his cost, that he could not run as he was accustomed to do, without them. He was much swifter of foot than either of those who followed; but yet, by the time that he had got three hundred yards down the lane, they had recovered their hold of him and thrown him down. In fact, it was a great convenience to them that he had run, for every step that he had taken was in the direction

which they had intended to carry him; and when they overtook him, he was not thirty yards from the garden-gate of the cottage. He was easily dragged along for that distance, brought into the house, and put into a room which had been constructed by the retired hosier for what he called the butler's pantry, though it is by no means to be understood that he ever had, or expected to have, such a thing as a butler, or anything the least like it. Nevertheless, as the room was destined to contain a certain amount of silver spoons, tea-pots, and other little pieces of the precious metal, strong bars had been put up to the windows; and the butler's pantry now formed a very convenient little cage for the bird which the two gentlemen had caught out upon the common.

Before they shut the door upon him, Mr. Henry Wittingham made some proposal to Captain Moreton, in a low voice, to which the other replied—

“No, no; he'll make an outcry and wake the women; and then we shall have it all over the place. You can lick him well before we let him out, if you like. Let us attend to the main business first, and, having got him in, keep him in; nobody knowing anything about

it.—Good morning, Master Wolf; you shall have some bread-and-water, if you like, but nothing else for the next four-and-twenty hours.”

Stephen Gimlet answered not; and it is to be remarked, that—whether he thought that shouting would be of no use, or that he chose to imitate the beast whose name he had acquired, in its taciturn habits under adversity—not a word had he uttered from the beginning of the fray until the end. He suffered the door to be shut upon him in silence; and, while he remained revolving what was to be done, or whether anything could be done, his two captors retired to the little drawing-room, where they sat down and laughed for a moment at the success of their scheme. Their first merriment, however, soon gave way to some uneasy sensations. Captain Moreton rubbed his shins, which had suffered considerably from the contact with Stephen Gimlet’s shoes. Harry Wittingham unceremoniously pulled off his boot, and found his whole stocking stained with blood, and the marks of four large fangs very apparent in the heel and tendon.

“Come along with me,” said Captain Moreton, when he saw his companion’s state; “we’ll

get a little salt and water ; you shall wash your heel with it, and I will wash my shins, for that d—d fellow has kicked all the skin off: salt and water is the best thing in the world."

While they go to perform the part of surgeons upon themselves, I will, with the reader's leave, return to speak of one of the actors in the scene of Stephen Gimlet's capture, who has not had as much notice as he deserves. The dog, who had followed him from his own cottage, after having paid due attention to the heel of Mr. Wittingham, and received a severe kick for his pains, gave chase to the pursuers of his master down the lane, tore Captain Moreton's coat with a spring and a snap ; but then suddenly, as if he saw that his own unassisted efforts could do little, and judged that it might be right to seek assistance, darted off at a right angle across the common, with his head hanging down, his tongue out, and some angry foam dropping from his mouth. He ran straight through a farm-yard on the opposite side of the heath, bit at a woman who was going to milk the cows, but only tore her apron, wounded the farmer's dog with a sharp snap, went clear over the wall, and straight on toward Tarningham, biting at every living thing that came in his

way, but never stopping to ascertain whether he had inflicted much or little evil. This misanthropical spirit soon called the attention of the people, and excited their indignation. They gave the poor dog a bad name; and, though no one could be found to undertake the exact task of hanging him, they followed with pitchforks, sticks, shovels, stones, and a very miscellaneous assortment of other weapons, such as pokers, tongs, &c.; and, driving him into the court-yard of the mayor's house at Tarningham, succeeded in killing him before he had done any further mischief.

Such is the tragic history of Stephen Gimlet's poor dog; but of none of the particulars were Captain Moreton and Harry Wittingham made acquainted at the time; for both those gentlemen thought fit to keep themselves strictly to the house during the whole morning. Of much and many things did they talk; they comforted the outward man as had been proposed, with salt and water; they comforted the inner man with toast, coffee, eggs, and broiled ham. The broiled ham left them thirsty; and at twelve o'clock, they tried to assuage such unpleasant sensations by a glass of cold brandy-and-water; and finding that

not succeed according to their expectation, they tried another glass hot. After that, Harry Wittingham declared he felt tired and sleepy with getting up so early, and retired to lie down for a time. He continued sleeping, in a broken sort of confused slumber for between three and four hours, when he was roused by hearing some very high tones, and apparently sharp words, proceeding from the neighbouring room. Without difficulty he recognised the voices of Captain Moreton and his fair companion, who had seemed in no very good humour when she supped with them the night before ; but he could not distinguish the subject of dispute on the present occasion, and, looking at his watch, he found that it was past four o'clock. Knowing that the dinner-hour at the cottage was five, he washed his face and hands, arranged his hair as best he might, and went down to the drawing-room, still hearing the strife of tongues raging in the adjoining room.

It was some quarter of an hour before Captain Moreton joined him ; and he was then informed by his worthy friend that dinner would be half an hour later that day, as the maid had been sent to Buxton's Inn, for the

purpose of ordering a chaise to be at the door at nightfall.

This announcement startled Harry Wittingham a good deal.

"But where the devil are you going to, Moreton?" he inquired; "you are not going to leave me alone with this fellow, are you?"

"Only for a short time, Wittingham," answered Captain Moreton, in his easy, nonchalant way,— "not long enough for him to eat you, or for you to eat him. You know what obstinate devils these women are; and I have got to do with the most pig-headed of the whole race. The fact is, Wittingham, we have got in our hands, if we do but use it properly, the means of having full revenge upon one or two good friends of ours; amongst the rest, that fellow who, as you ought to remember, was second to Captain Hayward in his duel with you—Mr. Beauchamp, he calls himself.

"Why, I hear he has turned out a Lord Lenham, and is going to marry old Sir John's pretty daughter."

"Exactly so!" answered Captain Moreton, drily; "but if he doesn't mind, his wedding tour will be a different one to what he expects.

However, I have the greatest difficulty in persuading my fair friend Charlotte from spoiling the whole business; for she is in one of her violent fits, and then she gets as mad as a March hare. She and I must act together; but I must not appear in the business; for you see there are two or three little things that the people might bring against me. I have resolved, therefore, to get over to Winterton, till to-morrow's work is blown over; for she will be present to witness the marriage, do what I can to stop her. As the mischief would have it, however, I threatened to blow the whole matter up, if she would not submit to management; and so she will not let me out of her sight, threatening, at the same time, to cut my throat, or some pretty little thing of that kind, by way of making herself a pleasant companion. However, she must go with me—that's clear—and come over in a chaise to-morrow to the wedding. If she does not spoil all, and this man here can be kept in, we have got them completely in our power."

"Why, what in fortune's name can he have to do with Lord Lenham's marriage?" asked Harry Wittingham.

"I don't exactly know," answered Captain

Moreton, musing gravely; "but I have a good many suspicions about him, which it won't do to mention just yet. All I ask is, to have him kept in here till after the marriage is over; and you will have nothing further to do with it than to keep the key of the room, and prevent any of the girls from going in. By so doing, you will punish him ten times more than if you licked him for an hour. I know you are not given to be afraid of anything; but, if people should make a fuss about it, it is very easy to say you did it to punish him for knocking you down in the way he did."

Harry Wittingham smiled; and the moment after, Captain Moreton continued: "Here she comes, by Jove! I'll get out of the way for the present, and cram some meat down that fellow's throat, without untying him. You'll stay, Wittingham—won't you? I shall be back to-morrow night."

"Why, I must stay, I suppose," said Harry Wittingham; "for good old Dame Billiter thinks I shall be here till to-morrow night; and I expect her to send me up some money, if she can get it."

Captain Moreton did not wait for anything further than this assent, but disappeared by the

right-hand door; and the moment after, the fair lady whom I have so often mentioned entered by the other. Her face was somewhat redder than usual; but that was the only sign of agitating passions that could be discovered in her demeanour. Her step was calm, stealthy, and cat-like; her eyes looked cold and flat, with a meaningless sort of glassy glare about them, as if purposely covered by a semiopaque film, to veil what was passing beneath. She looked slowly round the room, without taking any notice of Mr. Wittingham, though she had not seen him that day; and, walking round to the mock-rosewood sofa, she sat down in silence, and took some papers out of the drawer of the table. Harry Wittingham wished her good morning, and addressed to her some commonplace observation, to which she replied with a forced smile, and then busied herself with her papers again. When Captain Moreton re-entered the room about a quarter of an hour afterwards, a sudden fierce gleam came into her eyes, and passed away again; but she uttered not a word; and dinner being announced soon after, she took Mr. Wittingham's arm, and walked into the small dining-

room. When the meal was over, and she left the gentlemen to their wine, she passed by Captain Moreton's chair, and bending down her head, she said in a low voice, but loud enough for Mr. Wittingham to hear—

“Remember, Moreton—remember! You know me!”

Captain Moreton only laughed, though the words were said in a threatening manner; and, as soon as she was gone, he plied Harry Wittingham with wine, which was followed by brandy-and-water; and, in the pleasant occupation thus provided, the two worthy compeers continued to exercise themselves, till the sky grew grey, and the roll of a chaise was heard before the garden.

“There, Wittingham,” cried Captain Moreton, starting up, “there’s the key of the little cellar—small enough, but there’s sufficient in it to lay you dead-drunk for a fortnight. There’s the key of the cage, too; keep the bird safe till ten or eleven o’clock to-morrow. I will try to hold my grey mare in hand; and if we can manage both, you will hear some news to-morrow night, that will make you laugh heartily. Farewell, my good fellow;” and

going to the door, he shouted aloud, "Where's the portmanteau?"

"I put it in the shay, sir," said the girl; and, turning once more to Harry Wittingham, Captain Moreton told him that he should see him before ten the following night, and went to seek his fair companion.

In a few minutes more, they were gone; but the gentleman they left behind did not see any reason why he should not finish the bottle of wine on the table, "just to take the taste of the brandy out of his mouth." After that, he fell asleep in an arm-chair; and so sound was his slumber, that the maid came in twice and looked at him; but seeing that there was no probability of his waking for some hours, she put a fresh pair of candles on the table, and went to bed.

Harry Wittingham slept and dreamed: he thought he had committed some horrible act, that the hue and cry was raised, the whole county in pursuit, and that he could hear the galloping of horses coming close after him. He struggled to spur his own beast forward, but its legs would not move; and, looking down with horror and consternation, he found it was a rocking-horse with little bells at its ears and

its tail. Suddenly a constable seemed to grasp him by the shoulder, and, starting up in agony, he found the servant-girl shaking him.

“ Please, sir,” she said, “ Mrs. Billiter has sent up the man to say, that your father is dying, and you must go down directly.”

Without a moment's thought or consideration, Harry Wittingham ran out, snatched up his hat in the passage ; and telling the man to follow on foot, mounted the horse, and rode away to Tarningham.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE sun shone brightly in Stephen Gimlet's cottage from a couple of hours after dawn, till about an hour before evening's close. For the first three or four hours the same sunshine seemed to pervade the interior house that glowed without. Widow Lamb seemed contented with what she had done; her meek face wore as warm a smile as ever now shone upon it; and she busied herself during the morning in all the little household arrangements. The boy himself played about merrily, whilst she was occupied with the inanimate things of the place, and then came and said his first catechism, infamously ill, indeed, but still somewhat

better than usual. When the sun got round to his southernmost point, Widow Lamb, not at all surprised at her son-in-law's absence, as its probability had been announced beforehand, gave the boy his dinner, and took a very moderate portion of food herself; but, when the day had three or four hours declined from its prime, she wondered that Stephen had not come back, and, at the end of an hour, grew somewhat uneasy. She consoled herself, however, by supposing that Lord Lenham had not yet returned from London, and that Stephen was waiting for his arrival; but another hour passed, and another; and at length her son, Billy Lamb, made his appearance, inquiring somewhat anxiously for his brother-in-law.

Mrs. Lamb simply told him that Stephen was out, adding that he had been away all day.

"It's droll I haven't seen him," said the boy, "but I dare say he is vexed about his dog."

"Why, what has happened to the dog?" asked Widow Lamb. "He took it out with him this morning early."

"Ay, but the foolish people of Tarningham

killed it for a mad dog," said Billy Lamb. "I dare say the poor beast was not mad at all. I saw it afterwards, and knew it directly ; but I have seen nothing of Stephen."

"He is up at Sir John's," said Widow Lamb, "and I dare say is waiting till the young lord comes down from London."

"No, that can't be, mother," replied her son, "for the gentleman came down yesterday evening ; one of our postboys drove him."

"That's very odd," said Widow Lamb ; "I wonder Stephen has not come back, then. I hope nothing's the matter."

"Oh dear, no," replied the deformed lad ; "you know Ste was always fond of wandering about, and would, at times, be out for a couple of days together ; but I wanted to tell him that I have found out nothing about that Captain Moreton, except that he is going away from the cottage somewhere to-night. I did not see him myself, when I took the letters to him to-day ; but the servant-girl told me, she had been sent up to Buxton's Inn to order a chaise, and that it was to be down there just at nightfall."

"Ay, ill birds fly at night," said Widow

Lamb; "but I wish Stephen would come home, for he has been now gone well nigh twelve hours."

"Oh, he is safe enough, mother," reiterated her son; "it is not like as if it were night-time, or winter either—but I must get back, for there will be all the supper-beer to carry out;" and, after a few more words, he departed.

Hour after hour, however, went by, and Stephen Gimlet did not appear, while the good old lady's apprehensions increased every minute. She put the boy to bed, and sat up and watched; but eight, nine, ten o'clock came, and no one approached the cottage-door. A terribly anxious night was that which followed; and though about midnight Widow Lamb went to bed, sleep did not visit her eyes for some hours. She lay and revolved all that could have happened. She was anxious for her son-in-law; anxious for the result of his mission to Beauchamp; and she resolved to set off early on the morrow morning for Tarningham Park, taking the boy with her. At about half-past three, however, weariness overpowered the old woman, and she slept. Her frame was not very strong; and, exhausted with watching and

anxiety, the slumber that fell upon her was profound and long. The first thing that awoke her was the little boy pulling her by the arm, and saying, "Granny, granny! you are a slug-gard now, as you called me the other day. I am very hungry; I want my breakfast."

Widow Lamb started up, and looking at her old round watch in its tortoiseshell-case, she saw that it was half-past seven o'clock. Vexed and angry with herself, she hurried on her clothes, and proceeded to give the boy some food, urging him to hasten his meal, as she was going to take him a walk. The temptation was strong, and at about a quarter past eight they were out of the cottage, and on their way to Tarningham Park. She heard village-bells ringing merrily, as on a day of festival; but Widow Lamb's heart was sad. The whole country was smiling in the morning light; but, though to a fine mind the beauties of nature never lose their charm, yet to the old there is, at all times, a melancholy mingled with the pleasure they produce; and to the spirit cast down with apprehension or affliction the very loveliness becomes a load. The boy lingered, and would fain have played by the way; but

his grandmother hurried him forward as fast as his little legs could carry him; and they reached the mansion of Sir John Slingsby a few minutes before nine. There were carriages already at the door. Servants were seen bustling about; but all were too busy to take notice of the old widow and the little boy, till, going into the court-yard, she addressed herself to one of the helpers in the stable, whom she had seen and known, and told him her apprehensions about her son-in-law.

The man kindly undertook to make inquiries, and let her know the result; and leaving her there for some minutes, he came back shortly after with the butler, who told her, that Stephen Gimlet had certainly not been there the day before. "I can't stop to talk with you, Goody," he said, in an important tone; "for you see Miss Slingsby is just going to set out, to be married to Lord Lenham; but, as soon as they come back from church, I will tell Sir John; and depend upon it he will have Stephen sought for."

"If I could speak with Lord Lenham for one minute," said Widow Lamb; but the man interrupted her, laughing—"You must go down

to Tarningham, then, Goody," he said, "for his lordship slept there last night; or else you can go down to the church of Little Tarningham, where, I dare say, he is waiting by this time; or, what is better than all, wait here till they come back; and I'll give Ste Gimlet's little boy a bit of bride-cake."

As he spoke, he hurried back again into the house; and Widow Lamb paused and thought, with the tears in her eyes; but at length she said aloud, "I will go down to the church;" and, taking the boy by the hand, who did not at all like the idea of losing the bride-cake, she hurried out of the gates of the court, and pursued one of the small footpaths leading towards Little Tarningham. She was within fifty yards of the park paling, when Sir John Slingsby's carriages drove past at a quick rate; and Widow Lamb, though little able, from much exertion, hurried her pace, till the boy was forced to run to keep up with her. The church, as the reader knows, was at the distance of somewhat less than half a mile; and, when Widow Lamb reached it, there stood before the gates of the little churchyard, two or three handsome carriages and one post-chaise. Passing quickly along the path

through the cemetery, the old woman approached the door, which was ajar, and heard the full sonorous voice of Dr. Miles reading the marriage service. She pushed open the door gently, and went in.

There were a great number of people in the church, collected from Tarningham and the neighbourhood, some in the little gallery, where they could see best; some in pews in the body of the church; and one or two in the aisle. The latter, however, did not prevent the old lady from seeing straight up to the altar, around which was congregated the bridal party, with Beauchamp and Captain Hayward on the one side, and Sir John Slingsby with his family on the other. Just as Widow Lamb entered, Dr. Miles, standing before the altar, was saying aloud, "I pronounce that they be man and wife together."

It was evident the ceremony was nearly over; the marriage, in fact, complete. The benediction was then given, and the psalm said; and, after all those parts of the service which are usually read were concluded, Beauchamp drew the arm of Isabella through his own, and led her down the aisle towards the little vestry, which stood on the right hand

side of the church. The people in the pews rose up to look over; but, to the surprise of many, one of the pew-doors opened, before the newly-married couple had taken two steps; and a lady issued forth, turning her face towards the altar, and stood right in the way of the advancing party. Her eye fixed straight upon Lord Lenham, flashing and fierce; her lip curled with a smile of contemptuous triumph, while her brow appeared knit with a heavy frown. At the same moment a voice, which some persons near recognised as that of Mr. Wharton, the attorney, exclaimed from the pew which the lady had just left, "Now she has spoiled it all."

But what was the effect of this apparition upon those in whose presence it so suddenly appeared? Beauchamp staggered, and turned deadly pale; and Isabella recoiled in alarm from that menacing look and flashing eye, saying, in a low tone, "Good Heaven, who is this?"

"Who am I, girl?" said the lady, aloud, "I will tell you who I am, and let him deny it if he can. I am this man's lawful wife whom you have just married.—Look at his face: pale,

dastard conscience is upon it. He is well aware of the truth that I speak, and the crime he has committed."

But Beauchamp instantly recovered himself, and while a dead silence prevailed in the whole church, he put Isabella's hand into her father's, advanced a step towards the person before him, and fixing his eyes firmly upon her, he said—

"Charlotte Hay, you have laid once more a dark and horrible scheme to injure me. By cunning artifices and long concealment, you have taught me to believe you were dead for some years, and have waited till this moment for your revenge.—You know it, you dare not deny it—but you may yet find yourself deceived. In one point you are already deceived; for, doubtless, judging from your own heart, you imagine I have concealed previous events from this lady and her family. Such is not the case; and now you force upon me that which I have always avoided, the trial whether there ever was any marriage at all between myself and you."

"Avoided it, because you knew it could not be questioned," answered the lady, scorn

fully. "Your father and yourself took lawyers' opinion enough, and the reply of every one was that the marriage was perfectly good and valid."

"Not worth a straw!" said a voice behind her; and, turning round with the look of a demon, the eyes of Charlotte Hay lighted on Widow Lamb, who had walked quietly up the aisle at the commencement of this scene. For a moment or two she gazed at her as if striving to recall her face, and then gave a short scream, muttering afterwards to herself—

"I know who has done this—I know who has done this!"

"What is this, my good woman?" cried Mr. Wharton, stepping out of the pew, and putting himself at the side of Charlotte Hay.

Sir John Slingsby was darting forward towards him, with wrath in his countenance, but Dr. Miles held him by the arm, and Widow Lamb replied boldly—

"What I said, Mr. Wharton, was, that this lady's pretended marriage with Lord Lenham, then Mr. St. Leger, was no marriage at all."

"But why? Were you present? What can

you know about it? Are you one of the judges of the ecclesiastical court?" asked Mr. Wharton, with amazing volubility.

"I am no judge, and was not present though I was in the house," answered Widow Lamb; "but it was no marriage at all, and I can prove it; so you need not be terrified, dear young lady, for you are his lawful wife at this very moment."

Charlotte Hay turned towards Isabella with a look of withering scorn, and exclaimed—

"You may be his concubine, girl, if you like, but you can never be his wife, as long as I live."

"I say she is his wife," cried Widow Lamb, indignantly, "just as much as you are the wife of Archibald Graham, the minister of Blackford, my husband David Lamb's first cousin. You thought all trace of that marriage was removed; you knew not that there are people living who witnessed the marriage; you knew not that I have your marriage lines now in my possession, and a letter from your real husband, written long after Captain Moreton took you away, and after your pretended marriage with this gentleman."

“Produce them—produce them,” cried Mr. Wharton; “let us see what these wonderful documents are. Such papers often turn out mere moonshine in a court of law.”

“At all events, sir, this church is not a court of law,” said Dr. Miles, advancing, “such matters must not be argued here; and I must remark that if this lady had any just cause to oppose this marriage, she was bound to state it when called upon in the solemn manner which the ritual prescribes. How the fact of her not having done so may affect the legal questions implicated, is not for me to say, but I must declare that her not having tendered her opposition at the proper moment was highly wrong, and does not give a favourable impression of her case.”

The lady turned her fierce eyes upon the rector, and then glared over the rest of the party, but seemed without a reply, for she made none. Mr. Wharton came to her assistance with a falsehood, however.

“The lady was too much overpowered, sir, to speak,” he said, “and I was not formally authorized by her to do so. But as to this old woman, I demand that the documents she mentions be produced, for I have every reason

to believe that this is a mere pretext—in fact, a case of fraud originating in conspiracy, and I shall not scruple to give the good lady into custody if I can find a constable, unless she instantly produces the documents.” He looked full at Widow Lamb while he spoke, and then added, “Have you got them? Can you produce them?”

“I have not got them here,” answered the old woman in a faltering tone, somewhat alarmed at the threat of a man who had ruined her husband, “but they are safe enough, I am sure, and they shall be produced whenever there is a trial.”

“Oh, ho!” cried Mr. Wharton, “what, time to manufacture them! But I will take care of you, my good lady. I will see for a constable directly, and——”

“Nonsense, you rogue!” cried Sir John Slingsby; “you know very well that such a thing is out of the question. You can manufacture no charge upon such a ground, whatever others may manufacture.”

“Rogue, Sir John!” cried Mr. Wharton, furiously—“that man is the rogue who does not pay his just debts, and you know whether the name applies best to me or to you.”

“To you, lawyer Wharton,” said Stephen Gimlet, coming up the aisle ; “there, hold your tongue, for I heard all your talk with Captain Moreton this morning, and how you settled all your differences upon his promising you what you called a *post obit bond*, to pay you five thousand pounds upon the death of Lord Viscount Lenham. There, Goody Lamb, there is the letter you gave me yesterday ; I’ll tell you how it all happened that I could not deliver it, by-and-by.”

“Here are the papers—here are the papers !” cried the widow, tearing open the letter ; “here are the marriage lines, as the people call them in Scotland, between Charlotte Hay and Archibald Graham, and here is poor Archy’s letter to my husband written long after.”

“You had better get into the chaise and go,” whispered Mr. Wharton to the lady, who now stood pale and trembling beside him, and then raising his voice as if to cover her retreat, he continued : “Take notice, Sir John Slingsby and all persons here present, that I charge the noble lord there with the crime of bigamy, in having intermarried with Isabella Slingsby, his wife Charlotte Hay being still living, and that

I at once pronounce these things in the old woman's hands merely forgeries got up between her and Viscount Lenham while he was staying at the cottage of her son-in-law, Stephen Gimlet, *alias* Wolf. You will act as you like, Sir John; but it is only a friendly part to tell you that if you have any regard for your daughter you will separate her at once from one who is not and cannot be her husband."

Thus saying he walked with a well-assured air to the door of the church, neither looking to the right nor to the left; but the moment he turned away, Ned Hayward quitted the side of Mary Clifford, and with a quick step followed the lawyer. He let him pass through the churchyard, and open the gate; but then going up to one of the post-boys standing by Beauchamp's carriage, the young officer said——

"Lend me your whip one moment."

The man at once put it in his hand; and the next instant it was laid over Mr. Wharton's shoulders some five or six times with rapid and vigorous reiteration.

"I think the price is five pounds," said Ned Hayward, nodding his head to the smarting and astounded attorney; "it is cheap, Mr.

Wharton; and perhaps I may require a little more at the same price. Good morning," and he re-entered the church, while the servants and post-boys gave a great shout, and Mr. Wharton sneaked away, vowing vengeance for a future day.

CHAPTER XIV.

"COME into the vestry," said Dr. Miles, in a low tone, to Beauchamp; "you have many things, my lord, to consider; and we have here the eyes of a multitude upon us, the ears of a multitude around us."

"You had better go back to the park," said Sir John Slingsby, who had overheard the good old rector's words; "there we can talk the matter over at leisure."

"The register must first be signed," said Dr. Miles, gravely, "for whatever be the result, the ceremony has been fully performed—come, my lord. The circumstances are, undoubtedly, very painful; but it seems to me they might have been much worse."

With slow steps and sad hearts the whole party followed; Isabella, pale as death, looking down upon the ground, and Beauchamp with his lip quivering and his brow contracted, but his step firm and regular, as if the very intensity of his feelings had, after the first moment, restored to him all his energies. As they passed through the vestry-door Isabella raised her eyes for an instant to his, and saw the deep dejection which was written on his countenance. She touched his arm gently to call his attention, and said, as he bent down his head—

“Do not be so sad; you have nothing to reproach yourself with.”

“That is some consolation, dear girl,” replied Beauchamp, in a low voice, “but still I must be sad. How can it be otherwise, when I have to part with you for a time, even at the very moment I call you my own?”

Isabella did not reply, but her cheek varied, first glowing warmly, then becoming deadly pale again.

“Where is Ned Hayward?” exclaimed Sir John Slingsby, looking round. “Where the devil have you been, Ned?” he continued, seeing his young friend coming in at the vestry-door.

"I have been horsewhipping Wharton," answered Ned Hayward, in an indifferent tone ; "but now, Lenham, what are you going to do in this business?"

"To go to London directly," answered Beauchamp, "and bring this matter to an issue at once."

"Pooh ! the woman is not married to you at all !" cried Sir John Slingsby ; "the whole thing is a farce. Still I think you are right."

"I am quite sure you are," said Ned Hayward, "and I will go with you, if you will let me, Lenham. But first we must talk with good Widow Lamb ; examine these papers of hers accurately, ascertain exactly all the circumstances, and be prepared with every sort of evidence and information. Cheer up, cheer up, my dear lord ! Honour and straightforward dealing always set these things right at last. Shall I call in the old woman ? she is standing out there by the vestry-door."

"By all means," said Dr. Miles ; "it may be as well to make all these inquiries here, and determine at once what is to be done. The crowd of gaping idlers from Tarningham will disperse in the meantime.—Sit down here,

Isabella, and be firm, my child, God does not desert those who trust and serve him."

While he was speaking, Ned Hayward had beckoned Widow Lamb and Stephen Gimlet into the vestry, and, after they had entered, the old woman still leading the little boy by the hand, Dr. Miles took the papers from her and examined them carefully.

"The very appearance of these documents," he said, at length, "puts the idea of forgery, or at least, recent forgery, quite out of the question. No art could give all the marks of age which they present. But we can have another and a better assurance, I believe, than the mere look of the papers——"

"But what are they—what are they, doctor?" asked Sir John Slingsby; "I have not yet heard the exact import of either."

Isabella moved nearer to the clergyman while he explained, and all other eyes were fixed eagerly upon him.

"This first and most important document," he said, "purports to be what is called in Scotland the marriage lines of Archibald Graham, student in divinity, and Charlotte Hay, the daughter of Thomas Hay, of Greenbank, deceased within the precincts of Holy-

rood—which means I suppose, that he died in debt. The paper—I have seen such before—is tantamount to a marriage-certificate in England. The marriage appears to have been celebrated in one of the parishes of Edinburgh, and I have lately had cause to know that very accurate registers are kept in that city, so that the authenticity of the document can be ascertained beyond all doubt.”

“But the date—the date?” cried Beauchamp.

“The date is the 4th January, 18—,” said Dr. Miles; “just thirteen years ago last January.”

“Nearly two years before the execution of their villanous scheme against me,” said the young nobleman; “so far, at least, all is satisfactory. But what is the other paper?”

“Hardly less important,” replied Dr. Miles, whose eye had been running over the contents while he conversed; “but it will require some explanation. I would read it aloud, but that some of the terms are more plain and straightforward than ladies’ ears are accustomed to hear. It is signed Archibald Graham, however, dated five years ago, and addressed to David Lamb, who died in Tarningham some

two years back. He speaks of his wife Charlotte, and tells his cousin that he hears she is still living in adultery with Captain Moreton. He says that, as her seducer's property is somewhere in this neighbourhood, she is most likely not far distant, and begs David Lamb to seek her out, and beseech her, upon Christian principles, to quit her abandoned course of life. The good man—and he seems a really good man—says further, that although he can never receive or see her again, he is ready to share his small stipend with her in order that she may not be driven by poverty to a continuance in vice ; but he seems to have been ignorant of her pretended marriage with Lord Lenham ; at least, he makes no allusion to it.”

“That was because he never knew it, sir,” said Widow Lamb. “I beg pardon for speaking, but the way it all happened was this. Old Mr. Hay had spent all he had, and had taken to Holyrood to avoid his creditors. Archy Graham, who was then studying divinity in Edinburgh, had been born not far from Greenbank, and finding out Mr. Hay, was very kind to him and his daughter. Though he was not very rich himself—for he was the only son of a farmer well to do—he often gave the old laird

and the young lady a dinner when they could have got one nowhere else, and when Mr. Hay was taken ill and dying, he was with him every day comforting him. He paid the doctors, and found them food and everything. When the old man died, the young lady was left without any means of support. At first, she thought of teaching, for she had learned all kinds of things in other times ; but people were not very fond of her, for she had always been too gay for the Scotch folks, and there was something flighty in her way that was not liked. It was need, not love or gratitude either, I believe, that made her marry poor Archy Graham. Soon after, he got the parish of Blackford, and went there to have the manse ready, leaving his wife in Edinburgh. He was only gone six weeks, but he never saw her again, for when he came back to take her to her new home, he found that she had been receiving the visits of a very gay gentleman for some time, and had, in the end, gone away with him in a phaeton about a week before he arrived. Eight or nine months after that, a gay young lady came to stay on a visit at old Miss Moreton's, with whom my poor husband, David Lamb, was grieve, or what you call steward in England. I had

gone down with her as her maid, and had married the steward about eight years before, for my poor girl Mary was then about seven years old. We saw this Miss Hay, as she called herself, very often, but never thought she was the runaway wife of my husband's cousin. Indeed, we knew little of the story till long after. Captain Moreton was generally at his aunt's house, though he often went away to England, and we all said he was going to marry the pretty young lady, if they were not married already, as some thought. But then he brought over his own cousin, Mr. St. Leger, with him, and soon after we heard of the marriage by consent, when Mr. St. Leger had drank too much, and about his going away in haste to England, and we all said that it was a great shame, though we did not know it was as bad as it was. About four months after, old Miss Moreton died, and one day the Captain came down in great haste to my husband, and told him a long story, which I did not hear till years after, about his being on the point of selling the property; but that he would take good care, he said, that David Lamb should not be out of employment, for his father, the Honourable Mr. Moreton, would take him as

steward, if he would go up to Tarningham directly. My husband said it would be better for him to stay on the ground till Miss Moreton's estate was sold ; but the Captain, it seems, was in a great hurry to get us off, for he said that his father was very anxious to have a Scotch bailiff, as they farmed so well ; and he promised all kinds of things ; so that what with one persuasion or another, we were away in a week to Edinburgh, to take ship there for England. There we met with Archy Graham, who afterwards came to visit us ; and he and my husband had a long talk about his unfortunate marriage, all of which I heard afterwards ; but David Lamb was a man of very few words, and he did not mention to his cousin anything about our having seen his wife at old Miss Moreton's, though it seems the minister was even then going down there to try and separate her from Captain Moreton, for he had found by that time who it was that took her away, and it was because he had written several letters to the gentleman, and threatened to come himself directly, that the Captain was in such a hurry to get us away to England."

"I do not understand why your husband did not tell the whole truth," said Dr. Miles,

gravely; "it might have saved great mischief, Mrs. Lamb."

"I know that, sir," replied the widow; "but there are great differences in the way men think of such things. I asked my husband afterwards why he did not mention all about the marriage with Mr. St. Leger; but he said he wanted to hear more about it before he opened his mouth to any one; that he was not sure they had set up this law marriage as a real marriage at all; and that it might be only a sort of joke, so that if he spoke he might do more mischief than was already done. I knew him to be a very prudent, thoughtful man, very sparing, too, of his words, and it was not for me to blame or oppose him."

"Very true, Mrs. Lamb, very true," said Dr. Miles.

"Well, your reverence," continued the widow, "he did try to hear more of the business, as soon as he had time to think of anything but himself and his own affairs; for, poor man, when he came here he found that old Mr. Moreton had no occasion for a bailiff at all; and knew nothing at all about him. We were going back to Scotland, again, after having spent a mint of money in coming up to Lon-

don and then down here ; but my husband fell ill of rheumatic fever, and for six months was confined nearly to his bed. All—or almost all that we had saved was gone, and we had to try for a livelihood here as we best could. We did better than might have been expected for some time ; and David made many inquiries in regard to his cousin's wife and her second marriage with Mr. St. Leger ; but he only heard that the young gentleman was travelling, and that they had certainly never lived together. Long after that, came the letter from Archy Graham ; and my husband, whose health was failing, consulted me about it ; and I said, that, at all events, it was a pity Mr. St. Leger, or Lord Lenham, as he was by that time, should not know all the truth, for no one could tell how needful it might be for him to prove that he was never really married to Charlotte Hay ; and David wrote back to his cousin, asking him to send up proofs of his marriage with the lady. So that brought up the marriage lines, and I have kept them and the first letter ever since my husband's death."

"And is Archibald Graham still living ?" asked Beauchamp, who had been listening with painful attention.

"He was living not two years ago," answered Widow Lamb; "for he wrote to me at the time of my husband's death, and sent me up ten pounds to help me. Poor David had not neglected what he thought of doing, when he asked for the proofs; but we could hear nothing of you, my lord. You had been very kind to my poor boy, and I always put my husband in mind of the business, so that he wrote to you once, I know, saying that he had important information for you if you could come to Tarn-ingham."

"I recollect," said Lord Lenham, "such a letter followed me into Italy; but I did not recollect the name, and thought it but a trick of that unhappy woman."

"Well, my lord, the case seems very clear," said Doctor Miles; "but your immediate conduct in this business may require some consideration. Perhaps we had better all go up to the Park and talk the matter over with Sir John at leisure."

"No, my dear sir," answered Beauchamp, in a firm tone, "my conduct is already decided. If you please, we will just walk to your house for a few minutes. I dare say all the people are gone by this time. Come, Isabella, there

will be peace for us yet, dear one ;” and he gave his arm to his bride, who drew down her veil to hide the tears that were in her eyes.

All the party moved forward but Sir John Slingsby, who lingered for a moment, and laid his hand kindly upon the widow’s arm. “ You are a good woman, Mrs. Lamb,” said the old baronet—“ a very good woman, and I am much obliged to you. Go up to the park, Mrs. Lamb; and take the little boy with you. I’ll come up and talk to you by and by; but mind you tell the housekeeper to take good care of the little man, and give him a hunch of bride cake. I don’t think there will be much eaten in the house by any one else. You go up too, Ste, and wait till I come.”

When Sir John followed to the rectory, which was somewhat slowly, he found the rest of the party in the rector’s drawing-room. Now the house was built upon a plan not uncommon, and very convenient for studious bachelors like Dr. Miles. The drawing-room on the right side of the entrance hall opened by folding doors into a library, which formed a right angle with it, running along the back front of the house—for houses have contradictions as well as human beings, and I may add many a

man has a back front to his character as well as many a house. The library occupied one half of that side; the dining-room the other half; the offices all on the left of the entrance hall, and the hall and the staircase the centre.

Beauchamp, at the moment of the baronet's entrance, was speaking to Dr. Miles and Ned Hayward in the bay window; Isabella was seated at some distance, with her hand in her aunt's; and Mary Clifford was leaning tenderly over her. But the position of all parties was soon changed.

"The sooner the better, then," said Dr. Miles, in answer to something Beauchamp had said; and turning away, the young nobleman approached Isabella, and took her hand, saying, "Speak with me one moment, love."

Isabella rose, and her husband led her into the library, and thence to the dining-room, leaving the doors open behind him. "Dearest Isabella," he said, "forgive me for all the terrible pain I have caused you—but you know I was deceived, and that for the world I would not have inflicted such distress upon you intentionally."

"Oh, I know it—I know it," said the poor girl, her tears flowing fast.

“But out of evil springs good, dear Isabel,” continued Beauchamp; “by this day’s misery and anxiety, I trust we have purchased peace and happiness for the future. Yet for me, my beloved, remains one more painful effort. Till the decision of the law is pronounced upon all the circumstances of this case, I must leave you, dear girl. No happiness that your society can give me must induce me to place you in a doubtful position. I must leave you, then, my dear Isabella, my bride, my wife, even here almost at the steps of the altar; but I go to remove every obstacle to our permanent reunion, and I trust in a very few weeks to clasp you to my heart again—mine beyond all doubt—mine for ever. I knew not, dear girl—I hardly knew till now, how dearly, how passionately, I loved you, but I find from the difficulty of parting with you, from the agony of this moment, what it is to love with the whole heart. That very love, however, requires me to go. Therefore, for a short, a very short time, farewell, my love;” and he threw his arms around her, and pressed one kiss upon her lips.

“Oh, do not go—do not go yet,” said Isabella, clinging to him. “Oh, I was so happy this

morning, Henry, I felt quite oppressed with it. I am sure there is a dizziness of the heart as well as of the brain—but now I shall go home and weep all day!”

“Nay, do not do that, dear girl,” said Beauchamp; “for our parting is but for a short time. Every one judges that I am right in going. Do not let me think my Isabella thinks otherwise, do not render more bitter what is bitter enough already, by a knowledge that you are suffering more than is needful. Cheer thee, my Isabella—cheer thee, and do not give way to grief and apprehension, when our fate is lightened of half its weight, by the certainty, the positive certainty, that there is no serious barrier between us.”

“I will try,” said Isabella, “I will try; and I believe you are right, but still this is all very sad,” and the tears poured down afresh.

When Beauchamp came forth, however, Isabella came with him, and was calmer; but she would not trust herself to speak till he was gone. The parting was then soon over. Ned Hayward called up the carriage, gave some directions regarding his own baggage to Sir John Slingsby’s servants, and bade farewell to Mary Clifford and the rest. Beauchamp once

more pressed Isabella's hand in his, and hurrying out, sprang into his carriage; Ned Hayward followed, and one of the post-boys, approaching the side, after a servant had shut the door, touched his hat, and asked, "Will you go by Winterton or Buxton's Inn, my lord?"

"By Winterton," answered Beauchamp, mechanically, and in another minute the carriage was rolling on.

For about twenty minutes Sir John Slingsby remained talking with Dr. Miles; and then the party which had set out from Tarningham Park so happy and so gay, not two hours before, returned sad and desolate. Even the old baronet's good spirits failed him, but his good humour did not; and while Isabella retired with Mary to her own room, he called Widow Lamb and Stephen Gimlet into his library. After having assured himself that the little boy was taken good care of by the housekeeper, he repeated his sage commendation of the old woman's conduct, saying, "You are a good woman, Widow Lamb, a very good woman, and you have rendered very excellent service to us all this day. Now I am not so rich as I could wish to be just now; but I can tell you what I can do, and what I will do, Widow

Lamb. Stephen has here, his cottage as keeper. It is a part of his wages at present; but I might die, you know, or the property might be sold, Widow Lamb, and then those who came in might turn him out. Now, I'll give you a lease of the cottage and the little garden, and the small field at the side — they call it the Six-acres Field, though there are but five acres and two roods, and the lease shall run for your two lives. You may put in the little man's life too, if you like; and the rent shall be a crown a year, Widow Lamb. I'll have it done directly. I'll write to Bacon to draw the lease this minute," and down sat Sir John Slingsby to his library table.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Stephen Gimlet, approaching with a respectful bow, "but I think it would be better not to give the lease just yet—though I am sure both I and Goody Lamb are very much obliged; but you recollect what that bad fellow, attorney Wharton, said about the papers being forged; and if you were to give us anything just now, he would declare we were bribed; for he is a great rascal, sir, as I heard this morning."

"You are right, you are quite right, Stephen," replied Sir John Slingsby; "and Wharton is

a great rascal. I am glad that Ned Hayward horsewhipped him; I dare say he did it well, for he is a capital fellow, Ned Hayward, and always liked horsewhipping a scoundrel from a boy. But what was it you overheard this morning, Stephen? I hope you were not eavesdropping, Ste? That is not right, you know."

"Not I, Sir John," answered the gamekeeper, "but I could not help hearing. I'll tell you how it all was in a minute. Yesterday morning I was coming over here with the papers which Goody Lamb gave me for Lord Lenham; but I took a bit of a stroll first, and just when I was close upon Chandleigh Heath, Captain Moreton jumped out of a hedge upon me in front, and young Harry Wittingham pinioned my arms behind, and before I could do anything for myself, they had a rope tight round my elbows, and got me away to the lone cottage, where they shut me up in a room with bars to the windows, and kept me there all day and all last night. I did not sleep much, and I did not eat much, though the captain crammed some bread into my mouth, and gave me a pail of water, out of which I was obliged to drink like a horse; but they never untied

my arms. However, I heard a good deal of going about, and a carriage-wheels; and some time after — it must have been twelve or one o'clock at night—there was a great ringing at the bell, and people talking, and I heard young Wittingham's voice, and then some one galloped away on horseback. But nobody came to let me out; and I sat and looked at the day dawning, wondering when all this would come to an end. I looked long enough, however, before I saw a living soul, though about six I heard people moving in the house. About an hour after, I saw poor Billy Lamb out of the window, creeping about in the garden as if he was on the look-out for something, and I put my foot to one of the panes of glass, and started it in a minute. That was signal enough for the good lad; and he ran up and put his face to the window, whispering to me to make no noise, for Captain Moreton had just come back in a gig, and had met Mr. Wharton at the door, and they were both in the drawing-room together. I was not going to stay there, however, like a rat in a trap, a minute longer than was needful; so as soon as I found that Bill had his knife in his pocket, I made him put his

arm through the broken pane, and cut the cords round my elbows. I then got his knife to open the door, but the one I came in by was bolted as well as locked, so I couldn't get out that way. But there was another door at the side, and I forced the lock back there soon enough. That let me into the dining-room, which had two doors, too. Through one of them I could hear people talking loud, and the other was locked. I could not manage to open it, and though I had a great longing to go in and give Captain Moreton a good hiding, yet as they were two to one, and I was half-starved, I thought it might not turn out well, and stayed quiet where I was. Then I heard them talking, and Wharton said he could hang the captain; and I thought it very likely. But the captain said to do that would put nothing in Wharton's pocket, and he had better take his *post obit*, as he called it, for five thousand pounds, which would give him a chance of something, and come over with him to Winterton, and keep the lady quiet, if she would go to the church. There was a good deal of dirty haggling about it, but I made out that the woman whom he called Charlotte was going to

be at the wedding, and that she had a great spite at his lordship, and I guessed all about the rest from what Goody Lamb had told me. So, as soon as they had gone off in the gig together, which was not more than two or three minutes after, I walked out through the drawing-room, half-scared the servant-girl into fits, and came away to little Tarningham church, sending Billy Lamb up to my cottage. This is the whole story, sir."

The old baronet commended his keeper highly, and vaticinated that attorney Wharton would be hanged some day, in which, however, he was mistaken, for that gentleman lived and prospered; and his tombstone assures the passer by, that he died universally regretted and respected!

The day passed heavily at Tarningham-park, and Isabella remained all the morning in her own room. It was a very bitter cup which she had to drink; for to apprehension and disappointment was added another painful sensation. To her it was inexpressibly distressing to be made the talk of the common public. She had felt that the very announcement of her marriage in public newspapers, the gazing crowd in the church, the spectacle and the

publicity in fact which attend such events, were anything but pleasant. But now, to be the topic of conversation, the object of tales and rumours, to be pitied, commiserated, perhaps triumphed over — to be even slandered, added deeply to all she suffered both on Beauchamp's account and her own. However, she made a great effort to conquer at least the natural expression of her feelings. She knew that her father, her aunt, her cousin, all felt deeply for her, and she was resolved to cause them as little pain as possible by the sight of her own. She washed away all traces of tears, she calmed her look, she strove not to think of her mortification, and at the dinner-hour she went down with a tranquil air.

Her room was on the side of the house opposite to the terrace and the principal entrance, but she had to pass the latter in her way to the drawing-room. As she did so, she saw a carriage and post-horses at the door; and as she approached the drawing-room, she heard a voice loved and well-known. She darted forward and entered the room. Beauchamp and Captain Hayward were both there, as well as her father and Mary Clifford. The very effort to conquer her own feelings had exhausted her

strength; and joy did what sorrow had not been able to do. Ere she had taken two steps forward she wavered, and ere Beauchamp could reach her, had fallen fainting to the ground.

CHAPTER XV

WITH bitter disappointment at his heart, with the dark shadow which had hung so long over his existence, turning all the rosy hopes of life to the leaden gray of the grave, now returned after a brief period of brighter expectations ; with the cup of joy snatched from his hand at the very moment he was raising it to his lips, Beauchamp leaned back in his carriage, and gave himself up for a few minutes to deep and sorrowful meditation. He remembered well when first the feeling of love was springing up in his heart towards Isabella Slingsby, that upon mature consideration of his fate, he had determined to crush affection in the bud, to batten down the fountain of sweet waters, which he feared some malific power would turn

to poison, and never attempt to link the fate of that dear girl to his sorrowful one, even by the gentle tie of mutual love ; and now he almost regretted that he had not kept his resolution. It is true, circumstances had changed ; it is true, there were good hopes that the evil star of his destiny seemed likely to sink, and a brighter one to rise ; but yet a mind long accustomed to disappointment and sorrow can with difficulty be brought to listen to the voice of hope without hearing the warning tongue of fear at the same time. All seemed to promise well ; for the removal of that heavy weight which had oppressed his heart, kept down his energies, crushed love and joy, and left him nought in life but solitude and disappointment, and despair. But still his experience of the past taught him to expect so little from the future, that he dared not indulge in one vision of relief, and although he had used the words of hope to Isabella, he could not apply the balm to his own wound.

Ned Hayward sat beside him quietly, and let him think for about ten minutes ; and he did so for two reasons. In the first place, he knew that it was very vain to offer consolation so soon after a bitter mortification had been

received; and, in the next place, he did not wish to rouse his companion from the reverie till they had passed Tarningham-Park; for he judged that the sight of scenes associated in memory with happy hopes now removed afar, would only add poignancy to disappointment. However, when the park was passed (and the four horses went at a very rapid rate), he commenced the conversation in a way the most likely to lead Beauchamp's mind from the more painful points of his situation, and to fix them upon those more favourable.

"Of course, Lenham," he said, with an abruptness that made his companion start, "before you act, even in the slightest particular, you will consult some counsel learned in the law? This seems a case in which, with proper management, you have the complete command over your own fate; but where a few false steps might be very detrimental—so far, at least, as delaying the determination of the affair for some months."

"I know not, my dear Hayward," answered Lord Lenham, "how this may turn out; but circumstances have rendered me, once the most hopeful and light-hearted of human beings, the most desponding. I have a sort of impression

upon me, that the result will not be so favourable as you anticipate. I have to oppose long practised cunning and the most unscrupulous use of every means, however base and wrong. I must remember, too, that this business has been long plotting, and, depend upon it, that nothing which a perverted human mind could do to obliterate every trace of this former marriage has been left undone. Depend upon it the conspiracy has been going on for some time, and that the concealment of this woman's existence has been intentional and systematic. In fact, nothing could be more artful, nothing more base, but nothing more evidently pre-arranged than all the steps which they have taken within the last two or three months. Even on the very sale of her goods, which took place in Paris, about a month ago, it was announced by public advertisement that they had been the property of the *late* Charlotte Hay, Lady Lenham. I am afraid neither I nor any lawyer, however shrewd, will be found equal to encounter this woman, whose cunning and determination I never knew matched."

"She seems a precious virago indeed," said Ned Hayward; "but never you fear, my dear lord. I don't set up to be a Solomon; but

there's a maxim which I established when I was very young, and which I have seen break down very much less frequently than most of his proverbs; and it will go in your favour, if we but manage properly. It is this: 'Rogues always forget something.' Depend upon it, it will hold good in this instance. Indeed, we see that it has; for these good folks forgot completely the marriage certificate in the hands of Goody Lamb. Doubtless that certificate will be easily verified, so as to put its authenticity beyond all doubt; then nothing will remain but to prove the existence of your predecessor in the fair lady's affections at a period subsequent to her pretended marriage with yourself."

"That may be difficult to do," said Beauchamp.

"Not in the least," cried Ned Hayward. "He has written to the good old widow within two years, it seems. Of course, they will try to shake her testimony, and, though I don't think that can be done, we must be prepared with other witnesses. Now, you and I don't in the least doubt the old woman's story, and if that story is true, her husband's cousin, the fair lady's husband, was living, and the clergyman of a place called Blackford, not two years ago.

Everybody in his parish will know whether this is true or not, and a Scotch minister's life is not usually so full of vicissitudes as to admit the possibility of a difficulty in identifying that Archibald Graham, of Blackford, was the husband of Charlotte Hay."

"You should have been a lawyer, Hayward," said Beauchamp, with a faint smile—"at all events, you prove a very excellent counsellor for my hopes against my fears."

"A lawyer! Heaven forefend!" exclaimed Ned Hayward, laughing—"a soldier is a much better thing, Lenham; ay, and I believe, when he knows his profession, more fit to cope with a lawyer than almost any one else. It is always his business to mark well every point of his position, to guard well every weak part; and then, having taken all his precautions, he advances straight forward at the enemy's works, looking sharp about him that he be not taken in flank, and he is almost sure to carry the field, if his cause be good, his heart strong, and his army true."

Such conversation was not without its effect upon Beauchamp's mind. Hope is the next thing to happiness; and hope returned, becoming every moment more and more vigorous from

the cheerful and sanguine character of his companion. At length, Ned Hayward looked out of the window, exclaiming—

“Here we are coming to Winterton, I suppose, where we change horses. Devil take those post-boys, if they go at that rate through the crowd they will be over some fellow or another.”

“Crowd !” said Beauchamp, and he too put his head to the window.

The little solitary inn at Winterton-cum-Snowblast was on the side of the road next to Ned Hayward, but when Lord Lenham, leaning forward, looked out, he saw some forty or fifty people, principally country folks, ostlers, and post-boys, collected round the door of the house. There was a sprinkling of women amongst the various groups into which they had fallen; and, in the midst, appeared a common post-chaise with the horses out, while a man on horseback was seen riding away at a jolting canter.

“There’s something the matter here,” said Beauchamp; “I will tell one of the servants to ask.”

As he spoke, the chaise dashed on towards the inn-door, and Ned Hayward’s prediction

of the consequences likely to ensue had nearly been verified, for so eagerly were many persons in the crowd engaged in conversation, that they did not change their position until the last moment, and then a general scattering took place, which in its haste and confusion had well-nigh brought more than one man or woman under the feet of the leaders.

"Horses on," cried the wheel post-boy, as he drove up, speaking to the ostler of the inn, whose natural predilection for post-horses called his attention to the carriage sooner than that of any other person in the crowd.

"We ha'n't got two pair in," he said, in reply, "without that pair which is just off the shay; we ha' been obliged to send off one this minute to the magistrates, about all this here business."

"What is the matter, my man?" said Ned Hayward, out of the carriage-window, "what business is it you are talking of?"

"I had better call master, sir," said the ostler, pulling the brim of his old hat with a somewhat renitent look, as if he did not like to answer the question; "he'll be here in a minute."

"This seems something strange," said Beauchamp; "we had better get out and see. Open the door, Harrison."

The servant, who was standing with his hand upon the silver knob of the carriage-door, instantly did as he was ordered, and threw down the steps with a degree of vehemence customary to lackeys and serviceable to coach-makers. Ned Hayward being next to the door got out first, and as he put his right foot to the ground, the landlord of the inn came up, bowing low to the first occupant of a carriage which had two servants behind and a coronet on the panel. The bow would have been much more moderate to a simple yellow post-chaise.

“What is the matter here, landlord? Has any accident happened?”

“Why, yes, my lord,” replied the landlord, supposing our friend to be proprietor of the vehicle, “a terrible accident, too—that is to say, not exactly, either—for it is clear enough the thing was done on purpose by some one, who, it is not for me to say till the magistrates come.”

“But what is it? what is it?” said Beauchamp, who followed; “you seem to be very mysterious.”

“Why, you see, my lord,” replied the landlord, who thought he could not be far wrong in honouring both gentlemen with the same title, “it’s an awkward business, and one does not

like to say much ; but the gentleman's got his throat cut, that's certain—and whether he did it himself, or whether the lady did it for him seems a question. All I can say is, I saw him sound asleep on the sofa five minutes before she came back. He had a glass of brandy-and-water and two fried eggs just after she went away with attorney Wharton, and seemed quite in his right mind, then, only a little tired with sitting up so late last night and getting up so early this morning. But you don't seem well, sir," he continued, seeing Beauchamp give a glance towards Ned Hayward, with a cheek that had become as pale as death—"had not you better come in and take something?"

"Presently, presently," said Beauchamp, "go on—what were you saying?"

"Nothing, sir, but that the lady seems dreadfully wild, and I can't help thinking she's out of her senses—I always did, for that matter."

"Is the gentleman dead?" asked Beauchamp, in a low tone.

"No, sir, not quite dead," said the landlord, "and the surgeon is a sewing up of his throat, but it is no good, I am sure, for the room is all in a slop of blood."

"Do you know his name?" said Beauchamp.

“Why, Captain Moreton, I believe, sir,” said the landlord; “I’ve heard so; I don’t know it for certain.”

“I will go in and see him,” said the young nobleman, and he added, perceiving a look of hesitation on the landlord’s countenance, “I am his first cousin, sir; my name is Lord Lenham.”

The announcement removed all doubt from the good man’s mind, and Beauchamp and Ned Hayward walked forward into the inn, guided by the landlord. He conducted them at once up stairs to the rooms which had been occupied by Captain Moreton and Charlotte Hay. At one of the doors on the landing-place, they saw a man standing with his arms folded on his chest, but the landlord led them past to a chamber in front of the house, first entering quietly himself. It was a ghastly and horrible scene which presented itself when Beauchamp and Ned Hayward could see into the room. The floor, the carpet, the sofa, were literally drenched with gore, and even the white window-curtains were spotted with dark-red drops. On the sofa, with an old white-headed man and a younger one leaning over him, was the tall powerful frame of Captain Moreton. His face was as pale as death, his eyes sunk in his head,

with a livid-blue colour spreading all round them. His temples seemed as if they had been driven in ; the features were pinched and sharp ; the eyelids closed ; and the only sign of life apparent was a slight spasmodic movement of the muscles of the face, when the hand of the surgeon gave him pain in the operation he was busily performing. Two or three other persons were in the room, amongst whom was the landlord's wife ; but they all kept at a distance, and the man himself advanced to the surgeon's side, and whispered a word in his ear.

"Presently, presently," said the old gentleman, "it will be done in a minute ;" but Captain Moreton opened his eyes, and turned them round in the direction of the door. It is probable that he did not see his cousin, for they closed again immediately ; but nevertheless his lips moved as if he fain would have said something. Beauchamp did not advance till the old surgeon raised his head, and the young man who was assisting him took his hands from the patient's arms. Then, however, Lord Lenham moved forward, and in a low tone asked the medical man the extent of the injury. At the same moment Ned Hayward, judging that his presence there was useless, if not in-

convenient, advanced to a door at the further side of the room, saying to a person whom he instantly judged to be the mistress of the house—

“I think we had all better go in here for a minute or two.”

“The lady is there, sir,” said the landlady ; “we have put somebody in to watch her; for Heaven knows what she may do next !”

Nevertheless, Ned Hayward, who thought that perhaps some information valuable to his friend might be obtained, opened the door to go in; but the sight he beheld made him suddenly pause, though it had none of those very striking and horrible objects which were presented by the chamber he was just quitting. Yet there was something still, quiet, and awful about its dark features, which perhaps affected the mind still more. The room was a bedroom, with two windows, and a door on the left, which Captain Hayward easily distinguished as that at which he had seen a man standing on the outside. On the end of the bed sat Charlotte Hay, dressed exactly as he had seen her in the church, and nearer to him appeared a strong dull-looking young man, seated in a chair, with a constable’s staff in his

hand. The unhappy woman's position was calm and easy, and she sat perfectly motionless, with her high colour unchanged, her hands resting clasped together on her knee, her head slightly bent forward, and her eye with the peculiar dull glassy film over it, which we have already mentioned more than once, fixed earnestly upon the floor. She seemed in deep thought, but yet not the thought of intelligence, but rather the dreamy, idle, vacant pondering of mental imbecility. There was an undefinable something that to the eye at once distinguished her state from that of deep reflection; and a curl of the lip, not quite a smile, yet resembling one, seemed to mark out the idiot. The shutters of one of the two windows were closed, so that the room was in a sort of half-light, yet on the spot to which the gaze of Charlotte Hay seemed attached the sunshine was streaming gaily; and the contrast between her fate, her prospects, her history, and the warm, pure light of Heaven, was more painful than the harmonizing gloom of the dungeon could have been.

When the door was opened by Ned Hayward, though it creaked, as inn-doors will do, upon its hinges, she took not the slightest

notice. Indeed, she seemed unconscious of everything, but the constable who had been placed to watch her rose and advanced towards the door, to say that nobody could have admission there.

“When the justices come, sir,” he said, addressing the young officer in a low tone, “they can do as they like, but nobody shall speak with her till then.”

As he uttered these words he heard a slight sound, and turned his head ; but he turned it too late. Charlotte Hay had instantly taken advantage of his eyes being withdrawn. She was already near the window, which was partly open, and as he darted across to lay hold of her, she threw it up, and with one leap sprang out. Ned Hayward instantly closed the door, that no sound might reach the other room, and ran forward to the young man’s side, who stood with his head leaning out and his eyes gazing down below. The house was built on a slight slope, so that the back was a story higher than the front ; yet the height from the window to the stable-yard could not be more than twenty feet. But the court was paved with large irregular stones, and there lay the form of Charlotte Hay, still, motionless, and silent. No

groan reached the ears of those who looked down from above—not even a quiver of the limbs was to be seen. Some of the men in the yard were running up in haste, and the young officer and the constable hurried down. It mattered little, however, whether they went fast or slow ; for when they reached the yard they found three men lifting a corpse. Ned Hayward gazed upon that countenance where fierce and untameable passions had nearly obliterated mere beauty of feature, but no trace of passion was there now. All was mournfully calm, and though the eyelids moved once up and down, there was nought in the eyes, when they were for an instant displayed, but the glassy stare of death. The bonnet, which was still upon her head, was dented in at the top, and a small red stain in the white silk showed where the blood was issuing slowly forth from some hidden wound received in the fall.

They carried her slowly into the house, and placed her on a sofa in what was called the parlour, while Ned Hayward ran up-stairs to call down the surgeon. When he opened the door, the elderly man whom we have mentioned was washing his hands at the table, and Beauchamp was seated by the sofa on which

his cousin lay, bending down his ear to catch the faint words of the wounded man, who seemed speaking to him eagerly.

The surgeon raised his eyes as the door opened, and perceiving the sign which Ned Hayward made him to come out, dried his hands in haste, and went to the door.

"You must come down directly," said the young officer; "the unhappy woman has thrown herself out of the window; and although I believe all human aid is vain, yet it is necessary that some surgeon should see her at once."

The old man nodded his head with a grave look, returned for his instruments, which were on the table, and then followed down to the parlour. He paused a moment by the side of the sofa, and gazed upon the face of Charlotte Hay with a thoughtful air, then placed his hand upon the wrist for a few seconds, withdrew it, and said aloud—

"I can be of no use here—life is extinct. I will examine the head, however," and taking off the bonnet and cap, he pointed with his finger to a spot on the back of the skull, where the dark brown hair was matted and dabbled, saying, "Look there! I cannot make a new brain!"

Ned Hayward turned away with a slight shudder ; for though he had faced death many a time himself, and had seen men fall dead or wounded by his side, he had never beheld a woman subject to the fate which man is accustomed to brave.

“ This is a terrible business altogether, sir,” said the surgeon, following the young officer to the window ; “ do you know anything of it ? ”

“ Nothing,” replied Captain Hayward, “ except that I believe the unhappy woman was mad, for her conduct through life was that of a person hardly sane. Do you think Captain Moreton likely to live ? ”

“ Three or four hours, perhaps,” replied the surgeon, “ certainly not more. She did her work very resolutely, and with a strong hand. The hemorrhage cannot be entirely stopped ; he has already lost an awful quantity of blood, and he will sink gradually.”

“ Then you think that there is no doubt of her hand having done the deed ? ” asked Ned Hayward.

But the surgeon would not exactly commit himself as far as that.

“ He did not do it himself,” was the reply ; “ that is quite impossible. The wound is from

right to left, and drawn so far round that he could not have inflicted it with his own hand. He must have been lying on the sofa, too, when it was done—probably asleep, for the stroke of the razor was carried beyond the neck of the victim and cut the horse-hair cover through and through. The gentleman up-stairs with him is his cousin, I believe?”

“I believe so,” answered Ned Hayward, “but I am not acquainted with your patient, and therefore cannot say exactly.”

The next moment steps were heard coming down, and Beauchamp and the landlord entered the parlour.

“Will you have the goodness to go up to Captain Moreton, sir,” said the young nobleman, addressing the surgeon, before he saw what the room contained, “the bleeding from the throat has re-commenced, and nearly suffocated him. Hayward, I must stay till this is over,” he continued, as the old gentleman hurried away; but then his eyes fell upon the sofa, and he caught Ned Hayward’s arm and grasped it tightly without uttering a word. For a moment or two he stood motionless as if turned into stone by the sight before him, and then walking slowly up to the side of the corpse, he gazed

long and earnestly upon the face. His feelings must have been strange during that long silent pause. There, before him lay the being who had been the bane of his peace during all the early brighter years of life ; the woman who, without ever having obtained the slightest hold of those affections by which the heart, when they are misplaced, is usually most terribly tortured, had by one infamous and daring act acquired the power of embittering every moment of his existence. The long, dreadful consequences of one youthful error were at an end, the dark cloud was wafted away, the heavy chain broken. He was free ! but by what horrible events was his liberation accomplished ? What a price of blood and guilt had they who had enthralled him paid for their temporary triumph ! He could not but feel that, by the death of that woman, sunshine was restored to his path ; and yet pain and horror, at the means of his restoration to light and happiness, quelled every sensation of rejoicing. Mingled as almost all human feelings are, perhaps never did man's heart experience such mixed emotions.

After what seemed a long time to give to any contemplation, he turned towards Captain Hayward, inquiring in a low tone—

“How did this happen, Hayward? and when?”

“A few minutes ago,” replied his friend; “the constable who was watching her came to the door to speak with me; and taking advantage of his back being turned, she threw herself out of the window. Perhaps, Lenham,” he continued, with that good feeling which always in matters of deep interest sprang up through the lighter things of Ned Hayward’s character — “perhaps it is better that this is as it is. The act was undoubtedly committed in a state of mind which rendered her irresponsible for her own conduct. Had she survived, her fate might have been more terrible, considering another deed, in regard to which it might have been difficult to prove her insanity.”

“God’s will be done,” said Beauchamp; “that unhappy man is in no fit state to die, and yet I fear death is rapidly approaching. All his hatred of myself seems to have given place to the implacable desire of vengeance against this poor tool of his own schemes. He says that there is no doubt that she committed the act; that he was sleeping on the sofa, having sat up late last night and risen early this morning, and suddenly found a hand pressed upon

his eyes and a sharp instrument drawn furiously across his throat. He started up crying for help, and beheld the wretched woman with the razor in her hand, laughing, and asking if he would ever betray her secrets again. It is, in truth, a terrible affair; but I fear his deposition must be taken; and, if he is to be believed, she must have been perfectly sane."

"I wonder if she was ever perfectly sane?" said Ned Hayward; "from all I have heard, I should doubt it—but here comes one of the magistrates, I suppose, or the coroner."

It proved to be the former, and the worthy justice first entered the parlour and examined the corpse of Charlotte Hay as it still remained stretched upon the sofa. Country justices will have their jests upon almost all subjects; and though he did it quietly, the gentleman in question could not refrain from saying, after looking at the body for a moment—

"Well, we are not likely to obtain any information from this lady, so we had better see the other person, who is capable of being more communicative. Which is the way, landlord? Have this room cleared and the door locked till the coroner can come; he will take the evidence in this case. I must get, if possible,

the deposition of the gentleman, who, you tell me, is dying."

Thus saying, with the landlord leading the way, and Beauchamp, Ned Hayward, and one or two others following, he walked slowly upstairs and entered the room where Captain Moreton lay. The surgeon was bending over him, and holding his head up on his left-arm. But the moment the old man heard the bustle of many feet, he waved his right-hand as if to forbid any one to approach. Everybody paused for an instant; and in the midst of the silence that ensued, an awful and very peculiar sound was heard, something like that made by a horse taking a draught of water, but not so long and regular. It ceased, begun again, and ceased; and the surgeon laid Captain Moreton's hand down upon the sofa-cushion and looked round.

The magistrate instantly advanced, saying, "I must take the gentleman's deposition, Mr. Abbott."

"You come a little too late, sir," said the surgeon, "he will make no more depositions now."

It was, indeed, as he said. Captain Moreton had just expired; and all that remained for the magistrate, who was soon joined by one of his

worshipful brethren, was to gain all the information that could be obtained from the persons in the house, regarding the deaths of Charlotte Hay and her paramour. Beauchamp and Ned Hayward answered the questions which were addressed to them, but entered into no unnecessary details. The rest of those who were called upon to give evidence or volunteered it, were much more garrulous, and as the two gentlemen remained to hear the whole depositions they were detained for some hours at Winterton.

When all was at length over, and Lord Lenham and Ned Hayward stood before the indoor, they gazed at each other for a moment or two without speaking. At length, Beauchamp's servant came up from the side of the carriage, which having been ordered some time before, was before the house, and inquired, in a commonplace tone—

“Where shall I tell them to drive, my lord?”

There was a momentary look of hesitation in the young nobleman's face; but the next instant he answered in a decided tone—

“To Tarningham-park,” and turning to his friend as soon as they were once more in the vehicle, he said, with a sigh—

“I will at least carry her the tidings, Hayward, and then——”

He paused, and Ned Hayward asked, in his usual cheerful tone,

“And what then, Lenham?”

“Once more on the way to London,” said Beauchamp, adding gravely, but firmly, “there must not be a doubt in her mind as to the validity of her marriage. I know how one drop of such bitterness can poison the whole cup of joy; but tell me, Hayward,” he continued, in a more cheerful tone, “when is your own marriage to take place? You have told me nothing of it yet; but you must not suppose that my eyes have been shut either yesterday or this morning.”

“I did not mention it, because I imagined that you had enough to think of, Lenham,” answered Ned Hayward, “not from either want of frankness or want of regard, believe me. But to answer your question—the day is not yet fixed. Mrs. Clifford has consented much more readily than I expected, Sir John when he heard it was over-joyous, and Mary’s two guardians, knowing that their power is soon coming to an end, have determined to use it leniently. Heaven only knows, when we first

became acquainted, about three months ago by the side of Mrs. Clifford's carriage, I little thought that therein was my future bride. Had I known that I stood in peril of love, and that with an heiress, too, I believe I should have turned my horse's head and galloped all the way back to London. Nay, more, there has not been a day during the last month, till about a fortnight ago, that, finding myself in imminent danger, I have not been ready to depart, but circumstances—circumstances, my dear Lenham, those chains of adamant, kept me here, till one day, without at all intending it, I told the dear girl I loved her, and she bade me stay: so I had nothing to do but to obey, and now I think in three weeks more, thoughtless Ned Hayward will be husband of the sweetest and loveliest girl in the world."

"With one exception," said Beauchamp, smiling; "and one of the best husbands in the world will he make her. But one thing more let me say, Hayward; as little as you thought of finding marriage on your onward path when first we met, so little did I think of finding friendship, as little did I hope for or even wish it; and yet there is nought on earth I value more than yours except the love of her I love

best. Should the sage lawyers have a doubt as to the validity of my marriage with Isabella, should they even think it better that the ceremony be repeated, with the fair lady's leave we will choose the same day, and stand at the altar like brothers, as we have been to one another for some time past."

CHAPTER XVI.

BEAUCHAMP and Isabella were left alone together for a few minutes before dinner; for Sir John Slingsby and the rest of the party were considerate. She lay upon the sofa, still weak from the effects of the fainting fit into which she had fallen, and Beauchamp sat beside her, holding her hand in his. He had told her all that had happened, gently and kindly, not dwelling upon dark and horrible particulars, but showing her simply that the aspect of their fate was altered. He then went on to tell her his plans, informing her that it was his intention that night to set off once more for London, in order to ascertain, by the best legal opinions he could obtain, whether their marriage was really valid, and, in case of finding that there was even a doubt on

the subject, to have the ceremony performed again ; but Isabella changed all his purposes.

“ Beauchamp,” she said, for so she still always called him, “ I think I know you love me, and will not refuse me a request. It is this : Do not go to London at all ; do not make any inquiries about the validity of our marriage. Look upon it as invalid, and let it be renewed. In a few weeks, a very few weeks, Mary is going to give her hand to your friend Captain Hayward. Let us wait till then, and go with them to the altar. There may be some painful circumstances to me, some painful memories. I do not love to be made the subject of conversation and gossip ; and in the church the scene of this morning will come terribly back to my mind ; but in the meantime you will be with me every day, and that will compensate for a great deal.”

So it was arranged, and in six weeks from that time the two cousins were united to the men whom they loved. Difficulties and dangers have their interest in telling ; calm and tranquil happiness has too few incidents for record. Ned Hayward and Mary took up their abode with Mrs. Clifford ; and the fair bride had never any cause to repent that she had discovered in

her husband something deeper, finer, nobler than those who had given him the name of Thoughtless Ned Hayward. Certainly there were some changes came over him. He was as cheerful, as sunshiny, as frank and ready as ever; but he was not quite so fond of fishing, shooting, and hunting. He liked a quiet walk or ride with Mary better. He found out for himself a new employment also, and devoted a great part of his time to the regulation of Sir John Slingsby's affairs, easily gaining his old friend's consent, upon the plea that he wanted occupation. His rapid perception of the bearings of all things submitted to him, his strong good sense and quick resolute decision, soon brought those affairs into very different condition from that in which he found them; and Sir John Slingsby found, that by proper regulation, though with an income diminished by the careless extravagance of many years, he had really more to spend than when his revenue was nominally much larger.

Isabella and Beauchamp were as happy as the reader has already judged they would be. He was looked upon by his acquaintances as a grave and somewhat stern man; but Isabella had reason to know, that in domestic life he

was cheerful, gentle, and kind ; for it was only in the heartless bustle and senseless chatter of ordinary society that there came over him a shadow from the long consequences of one only error.

We have but few other characters to dispose of. Mr. Wharton's history has already been told. Mr. Bacon did much better in life than might have been expected. Although he was an honest man, he met with a tolerable degree of success, strange to say. Aiding Ned Hayward in the regulation of Sir John Slingsby's affairs, he ultimately became a sort of agent or law-steward to the baronet. Beauchamp, who bought the Moreton property in the end, employed him in the same capacity ; and two other gentlemen in the country finding that matters throve in his hands, made him their agent also. He never gave them any cause to complain, and derived a very comfortable income from the exercise of this branch of his profession ; but, what is far more extraordinary, in no instance did the property of his employers pass from them to him.

Stephen Gimlet, in course of time, became the head keeper to Sir John Slingsby, was well to do in the world, and gave his boy a very

good education. Widow Lamb lived for nearly ten years after the events which have been lately detailed, and she had the happiness of seeing her poor boy William, by kind assistance given when most needed, and judiciously directed when received, rise from the state in which we first found him to be, at six-and-twenty years of age, the landlord of the White Hart at Tarningham; and often, on a summer's evening, when there was not much to do in the place, he would stand at his inn-door, and, thinking over all the strange events he had seen in his youth, with a melancholy feeling of the difference between himself and other men, he would whistle the plaintive melodies of which he was so fond in boyhood, as if imagination carried him altogether away into the realms of memory.

There is but one other person, perhaps, who deserves any mention; and, though his career was brief, we may speak of it more at large. Harry Wittingham took possession of his father's large property with title undisputed. A pompous funeral excited half-an-hour's wondering admiration in the people of Tarningham when the old gentleman was committed to the grave; and for some short time hopes were

entertained, even by wise and experienced persons, that young Wittingham would change his mode of life, become more regular and careful in his conduct, and cast away the vices and follies that had disgraced him. For a fortnight he remained almost entirely at home, examining papers, looking into affairs, and showing no small talents for business. A number of petty sums, lent out by Mr. Wittingham on interest, were called in rather sharply, and some considerable purchases of land were made, showing a disposition on the part of the young gentleman to become a county proprietor. His reputed wealth, as is always the case in England, whatever a man's character may be, procured him a good deal of attention. People of high respectability and good fortune, especially where there were two or three unmarried daughters, called and left their cards; but Harry Wittingham's chief visitor and companion was his friend Mr. Granty, and two or three country gentlemen of the same stamp, who wore leather breeches and top-boots, rode handsome horses, and sported a red coat in the hunting season. The establishment kept up by old Mr. Wittingham was greatly increased, even within a month

after his death. There were two more grooms in the stables, two more footmen in the hall, but this was no sign of extravagance, for the property could well afford it, or even more; but yet there was a sort of apparent uneasiness of manner, an occasional gloom, an irritability upon very slight occasions, upon which neither prosperity nor the indulgence of long-thwarted tastes had any effect; and Mr. Granty himself, in conversation with a friend, thought fit to wonder what the devil Harry Wittingham would have, for he seemed never contented, although he possessed as good a fortune as any man in the country.

At length, Harry Wittingham gave a dinner-party, and fixed it, without any knowledge of the coincidence, upon the very same day when Mary Clifford bestowed her hand upon Ned Hayward. When he discovered that such was the case, some short time before the company met, he became very much irritated and excited; but pride would not permit him to put the dinner off, and his friends assembled at the hour named. Seven persons appeared punctually as the clock struck the hour, and shortly after descended to the dining-room, where delicacies and even rarities were provided in abundance,

with the choicest wines that could be procured from any quarter. The soup was turtle, brought expressly from London ; but Harry Wittingham himself did not taste it. He ate a good deal of fish, however, and asked several persons to drink wine, but it appeared as if he determined to keep his head cool, for he merely bowed over his glass, and put it down. Mr. Granty, who well knew his old habits, was surprised at his abstemiousness, and thought it hardly fair, for he had himself determined to have a glorious night of it at the expense of Harry Wittingham's cellar, and such conduct in the host seemed likely to chill the drinking propensities of his guests.

"Come, Wittingham," he cried, at length ; "let us have a glass of Champagne together."

"With all my heart," answered his entertainer ; and the Champagne was poured out.

"Now, Wittingham, drink fair," said Mr. Granty, laughing ; "for hang me if you have tasted a drop to-day !—This way, at one draught."

"With all my heart !" answered Harry Wittingham, and raised his glass. He held it to his lips for a moment, and then, with a sudden and very apparent effort, drank the wine ; but

a sort of convulsive spasm instantly spread over his whole face. It was gone in a moment, however; and, as if to conceal it, he said something sharply to his butler about the wine not being good. "It was corked," he said; and Mr. Granty, laughing, cried—

"Try another bottle!"

Another bottle was brought, and the glasses filled all round. Harry Wittingham raised his with the rest, but instantly set it down again, and pushed it away from him, murmuring, with a haggard look—"I can't!"

As may be easily expected, this very peculiar conduct had its effect upon his guests. The party was a dull one, and broke up early, every one remarking, that Mr. Wittingham tasted not one drop of all the many wines that circulated round his table.

When all were gone, he rang the bell sharply, and told the servant to go for Mr. Slattery.

"Tell him to come directly—I do not feel well."

In ten minutes more, the surgeon was in the house, felt his pulse, looked at his tongue, asked a few questions, and then said, with a smile—

"A little fever—a little fever! I will send

you a cooling draught, and you will be quite right to-morrow, I dare say."

"Don't sent me a draught," said Harry Wittingham,—“I can't drink it.”

“Oh, it shall be as good as wine,” said Mr. Slattery.

“Good or bad, it does not matter,” answered the young gentleman, staring somewhat wildly in his face; “I tell you, I can't drink it—I drink not at all—I hate the very thought of drinking.”

Another quick, short spasm crossed his countenance as he spoke; and Mr. Slattery, sitting down beside him, with a somewhat dubious expression of countenance, hemmed for a moment or two, and then said—

“Why, what can one give you, then? But tell me a little more of the symptoms you feel,” and he put his hand upon the pulse again. “Have you any headache?”

“No,” answered Harry Wittingham, “I have a sort of burning in my throat.”

“Great irritation of stomach?” said Mr. Slattery, in a solemn tone. “Have you met with any accident lately? Run a nail into your hand or foot, or anything of that kind?”

“No,” answered Harry Wittingham; “but

a d—d dog bit me just above the heel, six weeks ago, and it is not quite well yet.”

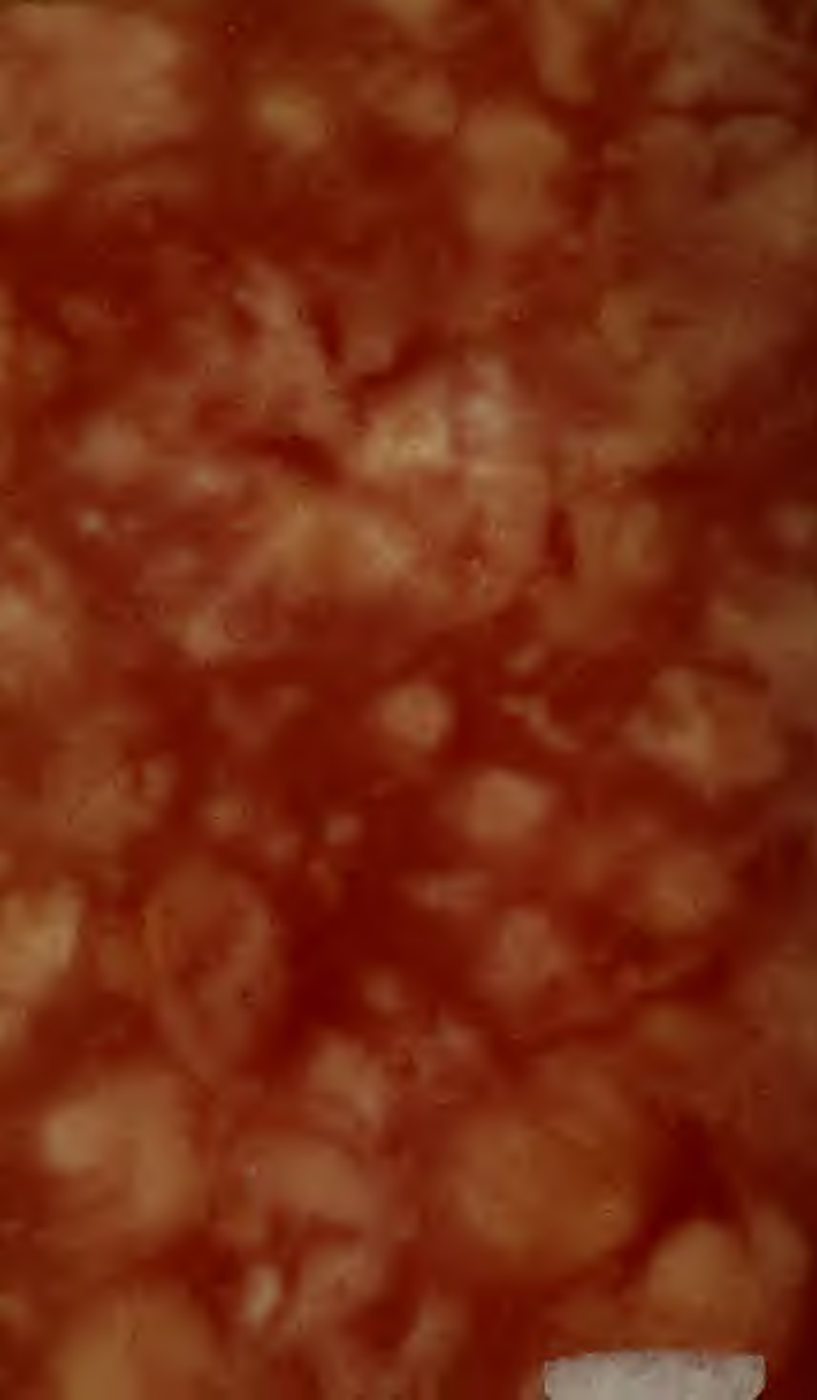
“Let me look at the wound,” said Mr. Slattery; “it may be producing irritation.”

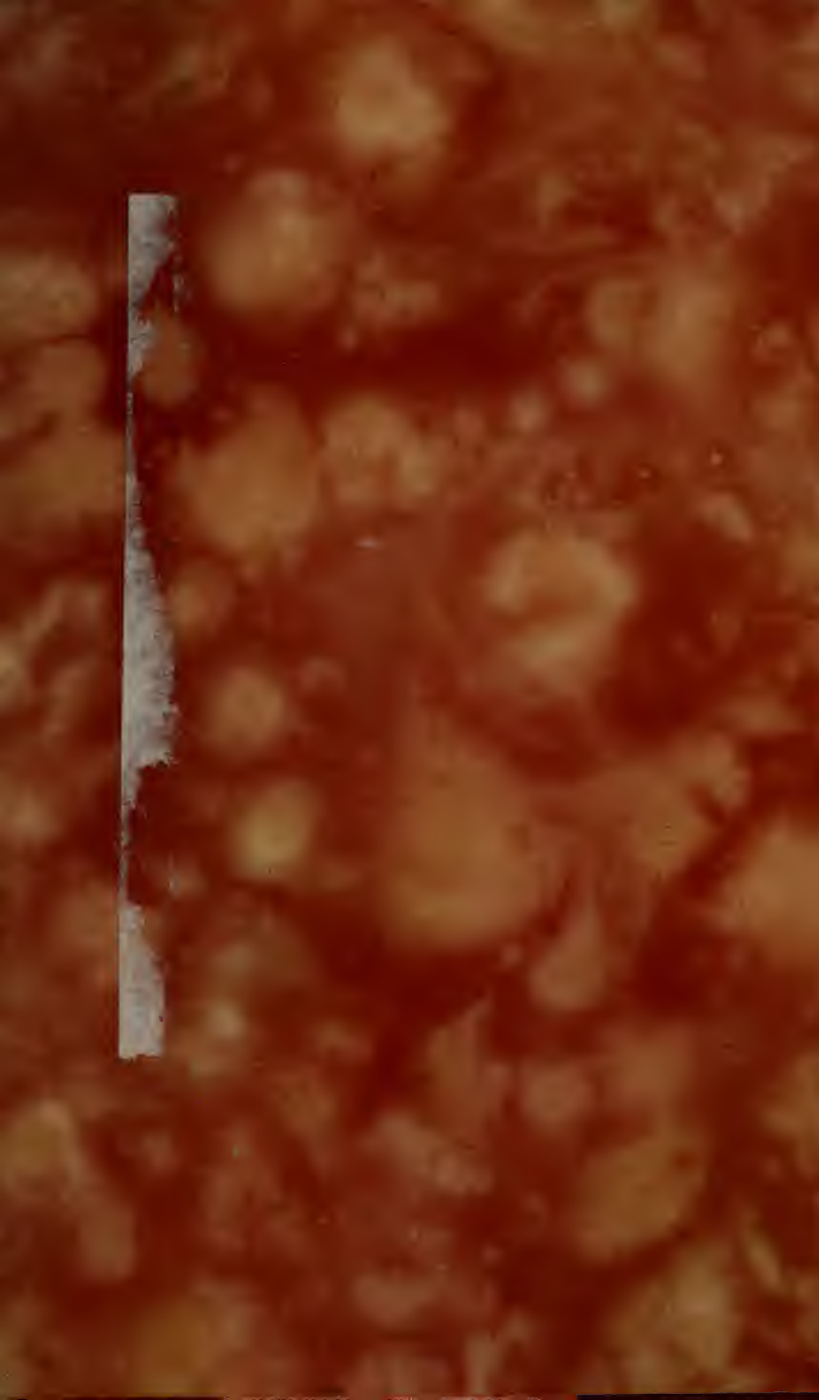
The shoe and stocking were soon removed, and Mr. Slattery perceived four distinct marks of a dog’s fangs in the tendon and muscles of Harry Wittingham’s leg. At each there was a round lump raised above the skin, and from each of them a small, sharply-defined red line was running up the leg towards the body.

Mr. Slattery bled him largely immediately, and telling him he dared say he would be quite well in two or three days, returned home, and sent off a man on horseback to the county town, for a bottle of the Ormskirk medicine. The Ormskirk medicine arrived; but instead of being well in two or three days, in not much more than a week after, Harry Wittingham was in his grave.

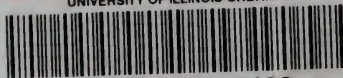
THE END.







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